

SERVICE FAILURES AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR OF SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA

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Abstract

Service quality is an invisible hand that influence the patronage of goods and services. Service is the heart of hospitality industry. The study adopted the correlational survey research design which involves the relationship between two variables. A sample size of 232 was determined from a population of 552 hotel staff using the Taro Yamane formula. Data collected were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient as well as Coefficient of Determination to answer the research questions as well as test the hypotheses at 0.05 Alpha level of significance. The result shows that service-related problems significant correlate with patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria. The researchers recommend among others that hotel management and their employees should endeavor to respond quickly and willingly to customer's problems and complaints by providing prompt solutions. It was concluded that service-related problems have significant positive relationship the patronage of hotels in South-South Nigeria.

Keywords: Service, Problem, Assurance, Empathy, Responsiveness

Introduction

Service quality is an invisible hand that influences the patronage of goods and services. Service is the heart of hospitality industry which its role in service industry particularly in hospitality sub-sector is indubitable. A customer's evaluation of hotel service quality in terms of food, cleanliness, ambience, security, hotel personnel, bedrooms, bathrooms or service provisions generally is critical to the success of any hotel outfit (Sharma, 2014). Service quality can be described as the value a customer receives for his money, time, and effort. Every customer has expectations of what kind of service he desires from service providers. Customer expectations are beliefs about service delivery that is used as a base or bench mark against which the performance of a service is evaluated. According to Kotler et al, (2012) customers have two levels of expectations in form of desired and adequate service. The desired service means the level of service the customer hopes to receive or wishes to receive from a company. Adequate service is the level of expectation when the customer recognizes that his hope to achieve desired service is not possible. Hence adequate service is the lowest he can accept if the desired does not come. The difference between these two is the zone of tolerance of a customer. The expectations of customers may be influenced by some of these factors; personal needs of the customer, external communication of the service provider, positive or negative word of mouth from customers past experiences (Ramesh, 2017).

In hotel services, the focus is on the customer and his satisfaction with both the result and the process. Service quality is defined in terms of attitudes, interactions, and perceptions. Thus, service quality is judged by what the service provider offers to the customer. In addition to this, even a customer's expectation towards particular services is also changing with respect to factors like time, increase in number of encounters with a particular service and competitive environment, among others (Ekinici and Sirakaya, 2014). Customer perceptions are judgments about the actual service performance or delivery by a service provider. This perceived value is the overall assessment of the organization by the customer and these are subjective. For example, the output of one department forms the input of another department. If a customer suffers delay in check-in at the front desk, no matter how well the room service waiter or waitress tries to please the customer, he or she will still find the service lacking. Customer's mood or state of mind and price element could also influence his perception and judgment of the service (Kotler et al. 2012).

Powers & Barrow (2013) suggested that service is particularly a pivotal or fundamental element in the hotel sector. The quality of service as perceived by the customer has two dimensions; technical dimension which is based on the outcome and the functional dimension which is on the process. Parasuraman *et al.*, (1988) in Kotler and Armstrong (2007) developed an instrument called SERVQUAL to capture a customer's expectation and perception of service quality that consists of five dimensions that include reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance and tangibles.

Assurance is the ability of the service provider to inspire trust and confidence in the service delivery. It refers to knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence in the customer towards the firm. Empathy refers to the caring, personalized attention the service firm provides each customer. When a service provider puts himself in the shoes of the customer, he may see the customers' viewpoint better. Responsiveness is the willingness of the service providers to help customers and to provide them with prompt services. The customers may have queries, special requests, complaints, or want to be treated specially. The front-line staff ability to offer service beyond standardized service to customers is responsiveness (Sharma, 2014).

Customer patronage is the economic and social justification for the existence of any business and customer satisfaction (Garga and Bambale, 2016). It has however, been described as the concept of repeat purchase behavior, which can be regarded as some degree of repetitive purchase of some brand by same buyer. When customers are satisfied with the quality-of-service delivery, they are more likely to consistently patronize the company. Ramjit and Abid (2019) suggests that perceived service quality positively influences customer patronage intentions. However, no matter how good service quality systems are, it is believed that service failure is inevitable (Morch, 2019). Once an offering falls below the perceived expectation of the customer, service failure has occurred. For example, if a hotel fails to provide a customer with the expected service, it will create a negative picture in the mind of the customer. Service failure causes customer dissatisfaction and threatens the growth of

service, because the business environment is becoming more competitive, and organizations are mapping out strategies to ensure they provide superior service quality and avoid service quality related problems (Ramesh, 2017).

Service-related problems such as complaints from hotel users ranging from poor handling of customers complaints, rudeness and disrespect to customers by front-line staff, theft of items forgotten in hotels rooms, incessant power outage, poor internet service and poor management of service failure have raised serious concerns on the survival of hotels in South-South, Nigeria. Customers who experience poor services or service failure in hotels will perceive the hotel in a bad light and this can impact negatively on patronage of hotel. The intense competition particularly with the continued springing up of hotels, has contributed to the concern to address service-related problems as a means of improving service delivery and customer patronage (Kotler et al 2012). The increase on service-related problems resulting from poor assurance, empathy and responsiveness dimensions due to poor management of service failure, poor handling of customers complaints, rudeness and disrespect to customers, and poor internet service are major determining factors influencing patronage of hotel services in South-South, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The need for this study arose from personal observations over the years that there are several hotels in the South-South that are no longer in business. These hotels sprang up rapidly and were luxuriant and after a while the influx of customers dwindled and some of those hotels eventually extinguished. One wonders why this happened even when the facilities seem superb. Previous research revealed that reasons including poor customer service, substandard service delivery, occasioned by failure in service quality dimensions such as reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness account for low patronage of hotels in their studies. However, the hotel service is still highly characterized with service-related problems. In view of this, the researcher decided to study the relationship between service-related problems and patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria in a bid to contribute to knowledge and provide an understanding of these important hotel service-related problems in South-South, Nigeria. Therefore, the challenge before this study is to examine the relationship between service-related problems and patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine the relationship between service-related problems and patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

- i. examine the relationship between assurance and patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria.
- ii. assess the correlation between empathy and patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria.
- iii. determine the relationship between responsiveness and patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria.

Research Questions

- i. What is the relationship between assurance and patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria?

- ii. What is the extent of correlation between empathy and patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria?
- iii. To what extent does responsiveness correlate with patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

H0₁: Assurance has no significant relationship with patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria. H0₂: Empathy has no significant correlation with patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria.

H0₃: Responsiveness has no significant relationship with patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria.

Review of Related Literature

The Concept and Sources of Service-related Problem

Service is a transaction in which no physical goods are transferred from the service provider to the customer. Its characteristics includes intangibility, heterogeneity and inseparability of production and consumption of services and perishability. The most basic characteristic of service is intangibility, because services are performances or actions rather than objects. They cannot be seen, felt, tasted or touched in the manner in which goods can be sensed (Zeithaml *et al.* 1988 in Kotler et al, 2012). The intangible nature of service is argued to be one of the fundamental characteristics which differentiate it from goods (Kheng et al, 2012).

Heterogeneity reflects the potential for high variability in service delivery. The quality and essence of service can vary from producer to producer, customer to customer and from day to day. Given the very nature of service, each service offering is unique, and cannot be exactly repeated even by the same service provider. While products can be mass produced and still homogeneous in nature, the same is not true of service. Perishability refers to the fact that service cannot be saved, stored, resold or returned. Services are performance that cannot be stored that businesses frequently find difficult to synchronize its supply and demand. Services are 'time dependent' and 'time important' which makes it very perishable (Garga and Bambale 2016).

Dimensions of Service Quality Related Problems

Dimensions of service quality that are often the sources of service-related problems include assurance, empathy and responsiveness. Each of these dimensions are discussed below.

Assurance: This refers to the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985 in Kotler et al, 2012). Its variables include competence, courtesy, credibility and security. This dimension is important in hotel industry because customers feel uncertain about their ability to evaluate outcome. This dimension focuses on job knowledge and skills, capability, accuracy, courtesy of employees and security ensured by the service providers. Hotel guests will be more satisfied when hotel staff are knowledgeable of the services they provide and this will affect the overall performance of the hotel positively and discourage service-related problems.

Empathy: According to Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) in Ramjit and Abid (2012), empathy involves the provision of caring, individualized or personalized attention to customers. It includes access, communication and

understanding the customer. Most customers prefer good service to lower prices. Think about all the situations where you are prepared to pay a little extra to get a better or more efficient service. Companies that give these added service benefits are likely to be winners, and have a competitive advantage over rivals. Customers are requiring and demanding better services and the goals of all hoteliers and employees must be to make customers feel special. This will lead to customer's perceptions exceeding their expectations and greater customer satisfaction.

A personal proactive approach such as knowing guest history, issues and preference are vital to impressing customers and decreasing service-related problems (Sharma, 2014).

Responsiveness: In hotel service, customers expect service providers to be attentive, proactive, and prompt to their requests, questions, complaints and problems. Responsiveness is the keenness or enthusiasm of employees in providing services. The speed at which customer's problem is resolved makes good customer experiences. Responsiveness also reflects the flexibility and ability to customize the service to meet customer needs and reduce the tendency of service-related problems (Kumar and Manshor, 2017).

Customer Patronage

Hotel patronage is the business that comes into an establishment generating revenue. Patronage can come in the form of customers, other businesses or companies. It can be seen as business or activity provided by a patron. The patron in tourism context refers to the tourist who patronizes a destination (Morch, 2019). Customer patronage according to Ogwo and Igwe (2012) is the total purchase by a buyer and the level of sales recorded by a business firm. Customer patronage is the approval or support provided by customers with respect to a particular brand. Customer patronage is the method of obtaining and buying a firm's product. In the service or hospitality industry, patronage is the acquisition of the service offered by a firm. Kotler and Armstrong (2007) assert that customers have varying degree of patronage to specific services, store and other entities, and they can be divided into four groups according to patronage status. Hard core patrons (customers who purchase services from one service provider all the time), split patron (customers who are loyal to two or three service providers), shifting patrons (customers who shift from one service to the other), and switchers (customers who show no loyalty to any service provider) (Powers & Barrow, 2013).

Marketing according to Kotler *et al.* (2012), is about creating value for customers and building profitable customers relationships. Customers are the pivot upon which the services of any business is built, thus providing revenue and stability for the business. Every organization depends on the customers' patronage to achieve its desired goals. They are the sole reason why the businesses exist. Ogwo and Igwe (2012) indicated that the aim of business is to ensure that customers are well satisfied. Once the customer expectations are met by the services offered, it enforces customer repeat purchase intentions, as customer satisfaction is a path way to customer

patronage. It is worthy to note, that customers have diverse motivation apart from the service quality dimensions under study, tastes and preference of customers also determine patronage of a hotel (Ramjit and Abid, 2019). It is therefore, imperative for the marketers to identify the determinant factors that influence customers' patronage. Some of the factors in hospitality sector are service delivery, cleanliness of guest room, problem resolution, employee courteous attitude, security, ambience, just to mention a few. Also, Pricing, proximity to hotel, purchasing power of the customer and demographic variables play a major influence on customer patronage of hotel. Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) in Kotler *et al.* (2012) posited that when customers are well satisfied, there is likely to be a repeat visit or repurchase intention to patronize the service.

Repurchase intention is one of the consumers post-purchase decisions that is used to choose the services of the same hotel when customers do not experience unresolved service-related problems. The consumer decision to repurchase intention depends on the evaluation of the service quality received (Kumar and Manshor, 2017). Kheng *et al.* (2012) pointed out that if the evaluation of service quality exceeds consumer expectations, then the consumer will repurchase the services. Otherwise, the evaluation of service quality is lower than consumer expectation and will produce the opposite effect. The consumer's decision to continue using the same hotel services will provide assurance to the organization for business sustainability and ensure consumers do not switch to other service providers. Customers are essential investors in business organizations and services provider's success depend on high standard of service provided and the satisfaction derived by the customers which positively affect their level of patronage (Garga and Bambale, 2016).

In measuring service quality, Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) in Kotler *et al.* (2012), came up with "the Gap model" that indicates a balance between the customer and the company relationships. The idea behind this tool is based on the assumption that service quality is dependent on the size and direction that would likely prevail in service delivery process. In the absence of service-related problems, quality service delivery by hotels generally leads to increased customer patronage, customer loyalty, customer satisfaction and increased profitability of the hotel as a whole.

Theoretical Review

Disconfirmation Theory (Richard Oliver 1977)

Disconfirmation theory argues that satisfaction is related to the size and direction of the disconfirmation experience that occurs as a result of comparing service performance against expectations. Ekinici and Sirakaya (2014) found in the meta-analysis that the disconfirmation paradigm is the best predictor of customer satisfaction. Disconfirmation theory states that satisfaction is the guest's fulfillment response. It is a judgment that a product's feature, or product itself, provides (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment, including levels of under- or over-fulfillment.

Disconfirmation theory argues that satisfaction is related to the size and direction of the disconfirmation experience that occurs as a result of comparing service performance against expectations. Basically, satisfaction is the result of direct experiences with goods or services, and it occurs by comparing perceptions against a standard. Research also indicates that how the service was delivered is more important than the outcome of the service process, and dissatisfaction towards the service often simply occurs when guest's perceptions do not meet their expectations.

The Expectancy Disconfirmation Model

According to Oliver (1997), the model consists of four elements namely; Satisfaction, Expectation, Disconfirmation and, Perceived Performance. Satisfaction is a judgment of the product by a customer. Therefore, satisfaction is the magnitude to which one is contented or well pleased with the product, or technology after using it. According to Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (EDT), it is influenced directly by perceived performance and disconfirmation of beliefs' is criticized for support that customer should approach a service provider with preconceived notion, rather than the purchase of a product with an open mind notwithstanding the fact that customers can take their expectations higher than what they can pay for. Expectation refers to the anticipated behavior a person foresees and will be linked with the product. Expectation is said to affect perception of product performance and disconfirmation of belief directly, and influences post-purchase or post-adoption satisfaction indirectly.

Disconfirmation is the consideration or assessment that one makes concerning the product, service, or technology. The consideration and assessment are made by comparing one's actual expectations. When a supposed product, or technology exceeds one's actual expectation, then the disconfirmation is positive, but when it does not meet one's actual expectation, it is negative. Disconfirmation consists of positive, negative, and simple disconfirmation. Negative disconfirmation occurs when real performance of a product cannot meet customer's expectation and this makes the customer dissatisfied. Positive disconfirmation results to a customer's satisfaction where the perceived performance exceeds the customer's satisfaction. Simple disconfirmation happens when no distinction exists between the customers' expectation and the products' real performance. Perceived performance relates to one's perceptions about the real performance of product or technology. The theory however, assumes that perception of performance is influenced by pre-purchase and pre-adoption expectation which then affects disconfirmation of belief, post-purchase, or post-adoption satisfaction directly.

Empirical Review

Jay and Kumar (2020) conducted a study on guest's perception towards service quality in hotels of Chandigarh. A planned questionnaire was used to conduct the research. Regression analysis was adopted in the research. Result shows that guests' perception has significant effect on service quality in Chandigarh hotels. The researchers concluded that service quality is a core concept and a significant success factor in the hospitality industry and

also viewed service quality as the life of the hotel without providing a good service quality, no hotel in this world can survive for a longer duration of time period.

Ramesh (2017) conducted a study on mapping service quality in hospitality industry. The research framework was to assess service quality and customer satisfaction in four-star hotel in North India. Convenience sampling method was used. Questionnaire was self-administered to guests while checking in and checking out of the hotel. Data was analyzed using regression analysis. The result indicated that service quality can significantly influence the satisfaction level of hotel guests. The researcher concluded that service quality significantly influenced the satisfaction level of hotel guests in four-star hotel in North India.

Methodology

The study adopted the correlational survey research design which involves the relationship between two variables. The population of the study is made up of 552 staff selected from each five-star hotel in South-South, Nigeria. A sample size of 232 was determined using the Taro Yamane formula. Data collected were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient as well as Coefficient of Determination to answer the research questions as well as test the hypotheses at 0.05 Alpha level of significance.

Research Question 1

What is the relationship between Assurance and Patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria?

Table 1

Variables	R	R-square	%contribution
Assurance	0.921	0.848	84.8

Patronage of Hotels

The result in Table 1 shows a strong positive relationship between assurance and patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria. This implies that an improvement in assurance would lead to increased patronage of hotels. It also revealed that assurance contributed 84.8% to the variance observed by patronage of hotels. This indicates that 84.8% of the variation in patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria can be explained by assurance. The rest (15.6%) can be explained by others factors.

H0₁: Assurance has no significant relationship with patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria.

Table 2: Significant relationship of between Assurance and Patronage of Hotels

Variables	R	R-square	Sig.	Decision
Assurance	0.921	0.848	0.000	Significant

Patronage of Hotels

From the correlation analysis shown in Table 2, the statement of hypothesis 1 is rejected; implying that assurance significantly relate with patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria. This is because the p-value (Sig. = .000) is less than 0.05 alpha level of significance.

Research Question 2

What is the correlation between empathy and patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria?

Table 3: Correlation coefficient between Empathy and Patronage of Hotels

Variables	R	R-square	%contribution
Empathy	0.917	0.841	84.1
Patronage of Hotels			

The result in Table 3 shows a strong positive relationship between empathy and patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria. This implies that an improvement in empathy would lead to increased patronage of hotels. It also revealed that empathy contributed 84.1% to the variance observed in patronage of hotels. This indicates that 84.1% of the variation in patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria can be explained by empathy. The rest (15.9%) can be explained by others factors.

H0₂: Empathy has no significant correlation with patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria.

Table 4: Significant correlation between Empathy and Patronage of Hotels

Variables	R	R-square	Sig.	Decision
Empathy	0.917	0.841	0.000	Significant
Patronage of Hotels				

From the correlation analysis shown in Table 4, the statement of hypothesis 2 is rejected; implying that empathy significantly correlate with patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria. This is because the p-value (Sig. = 0.000) is less than 0.05 alpha level of significance.

Research Question 3

To what extent does responsiveness correlate with patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria?

Table 5: Correlation coefficient of between Responsiveness and Patronage of Hotels

Variables	R	R-square	%contribution
Responsiveness	0.990	0.980	98.0
Patronage of Hotels			

Table 5 presents the relationship between responsiveness and patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria. The result shows a strong positive relationship between responsiveness and patronage of hotels. This implies that an increase in service-related problem such as responsiveness would lead to increased patronage of hotels. It also revealed that responsiveness contributed 98% to the variance observed in patronage of hotels. This indicates that 98% of the variation in patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria can be explained by responsiveness. The rest (2%) can be explained by others factors.

Discussion of Findings**Extent to which assurance correlate with patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria.**

The result in this study shows a strong positive relationship between assurance and patronage of hotels in South-South Nigeria. This implies that an improvement in assurance would lead to increased hotel patronage. It also revealed that assurance contributed 84.8% to the variance observed in hotel patronage. This indicates that 84.8% of the variation in patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria can be explained by assurance. The rest (15.2%) can be explained by others factors. From the analysis shown in this study, the statement of hypothesis one is rejected; implying that assurance significantly relate with patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria. This is because the p-value is less than alpha level of significance. This is not surprising because assurance is the ability of the service provider to inspire trust and confidence in the service delivery. This is in line with the findings of Kotler and Amstrong (2012) on guest's perception towards service quality in hotels of Chandigarh that viewed service quality as the life of the hotel and maintained that without providing a good service quality, no hotel in this world can survive for a longer duration of time period.

Extent to which empathy correlate with patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria.

The result of this study shows a strong positive relationship between empathy and patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria. This implies that an improvement in empathy would lead to increased patronage of hotels. It also revealed that empathy contributed 84.1% to the variance observed in patronage of hotels. This indicates that 84.1% of the variation in patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria can be explained by empathy. The rest (15.9%) can be explained by others factors. From the analysis shown in this study, the statement of hypothesis two is rejected; implying that empathy significantly correlate with patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria. This is because the p-value is less than alpha level of significance. This is expected due to the fact that service-related problem factor such as empathy determines the patronage of hotels. This finding corroborates the results of Ramesh (2017) who conducted a study on mapping service quality in hospitality industry to assess service quality and customer satisfaction in four-star hotel in North India. Using regression analysis, result indicated that service quality can significantly influence the satisfaction level of hotel guests.

Extent to which responsiveness correlate with patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria.

The finding of this study shows a strong positive relationship between responsiveness and patronage of hotels. This implies that an increase in responsiveness would lead to increased patronage of hotels. It also revealed that responsiveness contributed 98% to the variance observed in patronage of hotels. This indicates that 98% of the variation in patronage of hotels in South South, Nigeria can be explained by the responsiveness. The rest (2%) can be explained by others factors. From the analysis shown in this study, the statement of hypothesis three is rejected; implying that responsiveness significantly correlates with patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria. This is because the p-value is less than alpha level of significance. This is not surprising because responsiveness

is the keenness or enthusiasm of employees in providing services. Hence, the speed at which customer's problem is resolved makes good customer experiences. This eventually will influence patronage of hotels. This is in accordance with the findings of Kumar and Manshor (2017) that examined service quality and customer satisfaction in hotels in Malaysia. Using correlation analysis, result revealed that service quality significantly correlates with satisfaction level of hotel users.

Conclusion

Service-related problems such as assurance, empathy, and responsiveness were found to be an invisible hand that influences the patronage of goods and services in hotels. A positive significant relationship exists between assurance and patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria. Assurance contributed 84.8% to the variance observed in patronage of hotels. It was found that a positive significant relationship exists between empathy and patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria that empathy contributed 84.1% to the variance observed in patronage of hotels. There is also a strong positive significant relationship between responsiveness and patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria with responsiveness contributing 98% of the variance observed in patronage of hotels in South-South, Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that:

- i. Hotel service providers should instill confidence and trust on their guests to enhance patronage.
- ii. Hotel service providers should make for an adequate provision of caring, individualized or personalized attention to customers than reduction of prices.
- iii. Hotel management and their employees should endeavor to respond quickly and willingly to customer's problems and complaints by providing prompt solutions.

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