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Effect of Service Quality on Customer Retention of Hotel Businesses in Taraba State, Nigeria

By

[1]Atogye, Tsokwa Wunuji, [2]Agyo, Atswenbuma, [2]Timothy Fanya & [3]John Fumba

Department of Business Administration
[1] Tsokwa4otoconcept@gmail.com
[2]atswenbuma@fuwukari.edu.ng
[2]Timothy.fanya@gmail.com
[3]fumba2687@gmail.com

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of service quality on customer retention in hotel business in Wukari, Taraba State Nigeria. The effect of three proxies of service quality: tangibility, employees' responsiveness and service assurance on customer retention were studied. The study adopts a quantitative approach where 388 hotel customers were surveyed using questionnaire. Multiple regression was used to test the three null hypotheses formulated for the study. The finding of the study showed that hotel service tangibility, employees' responsiveness and service assurance given to customers affect customer retention positively and significantly. The study thus recommends that hotels should improve their physical structures, train employees to be polite in responding to customers' needs, and build confidence in the minds of the customers so that they would always remember the hotel and patronized them.

Keywords: Service Quality, Customer Retention, SERQUAL Model, and Hotel Business

Introduction

The quality of service the company gives its customers is a key part of its ability to complete its mission. Since the firm's bottom line is directly tied to its capacity to turn a profit, providing high-quality service is crucial in ensuring customer satisfaction, loyalty, and retention. As a result, customers are more likely to become repeat buyers, spend more money, try new services, be less price-sensitive, and spread the word about their pleasant experiences. Service quality, or SQ, is the

average opinion of customers about how good or bad the company and its services are. It is the difference between what people think a service is worth or how good it is and what they actually get out of it (Alketbi et al., 2020; Alshamsi et al., 2021; Hamilton-Ibama et al., 2022). The value of service quality hinges on its intangible nature and its ability to fulfil customers' expectations. Service quality (SQ) is an important strategic tool for differentiating the business model and creating a firm's competitiveness by attracting new consumers and retaining the existing ones. This worthiness or superiority is seen in the areas of service tangibility, responsiveness of employees, assurance, empathy for customers, and the reliability of service delivery (Sugiarto & Octaviana, 2021).

Service quality may be ethereal, yet it has measurable outcomes for the business. The physical structures and products that a business creates are its "tangibility" to consumers. The appearance of the staff, the supplies used, the ambience created by the furnishings and lighting, and the accessibility of the business are all indicators of service excellence. A lot of hospitality and service providers care a lot about the way their staff looks, so they invest in excellent uniforms, tools, and storage and work areas (Amin et al., 2013; Ennew & Binks, 1996; Zeitham et al., 2006). Customers are given indications of service quality by visual cues such as the condition of buildings and equipment, the friendliness of staff, and the clarity of messages. In the same way, research by Barusman et al. (2020) shows that being responsive to customers needs or wants can lead to greater customer satisfaction and loyalty. The ability to respond quickly and effectively to the needs of customers is a sign of a service culture built on responsiveness. And this has an impact on customer retention. Assurance is another metric for gauging service quality; it evaluates the process, the staff's knowledge, and their ability to inspire confidence in their consumers. For instance, employees' affability, constant politeness, and knowledge of the proper answers to customer concerns all contribute to a positive customer service experience. Consumers typically look to employees for comfort, and they expect employees to convey and demonstrate confidence (Sugiarto & Octaviana, 2021). Reliability as another proxy of service quality is the consistent and correct provision of the service that was promised. Reliability illustrates how quality holds up over time. This, too, has an effect on customers. Additionally, customers are provided empathy when they are shown special care and consideration. Service quality that demonstrates empathy

demonstrates to customers that the company cares about them as individuals, always acts in their best interests, and is sensitive to their wants and concerns.

Anchoring on the expectation confirmation theory by Richard Oliver (1977), we argue that service quality can affect customer retention. We explicate that customer satisfaction is a resultant effect of the service received compared to the expectations and perceptions of the customers. When customers experiences and knowledge of a firm and its service match what they expect, they will feel satisfied, which in turn will influence their loyalty and their intention to switch to another firm. Customer retention is the process that businesses use to keep their current customers and keep them from going to a competitor. To further our argument, we hypothesize that the success and profitability of a service can be measured by the rate at which customers remain subscribed to its offerings over time. We believe that customer retention is more cost-effective to enable firms to maximize profit than spending more resources on only building new customers. As part of our research hypotheses, we assumed that the five dimensions of service quality (SERVQUAL Model) propounded by Parasuraman, Rust, and Zahorik (1980) have a significant effect on customer satisfaction and loyalty, which will in turn affect their retention, especially for the hospitality industry in Taraba State.

As the hospitality industry grows and competition increases, it's important to keep customers instead of just getting new ones. As a marketing objective, retaining customers involves preventing them from switching to a rival. The goal of management in the hospitality industry (which includes hotels and businesses that provide catering, cleaning services, entertainment, and event planning) is to provide superior service, boost reputation, increase customer loyalty, boost repeat business, and bring in new consumers through positive word of mouth.

We have observed the spring of new hotels and eateries, restaurants, laundry service and so on in Taraba State at various location but in terms of quality service delivery, customers have shown indifference attitude toward them. Most at times, price determines their choices of hotel to lodge. With this scenario of service indifference, hotel core competencies will not be built thus, affecting satisfaction, loyalty and retention and profitability which are the core value of the firm's existence. In another side of the spectrum, literature have not shown the casual effect of service quality on customer retention of Hotels in Taraba State to enable them take strategic decision on which

approach dimension can affect retention and ensures profitability. Similarly, the theory of expectation conformation postulated the direct effect of service quality to customer satisfaction and loyalty but retention is explicated as an indirect interaction with service quality. We argue for the theoretical extension of expectation confirmation theory to integrate and explain its assumptions to cover direct interrelationship with customer retention.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to determine the effect of service quality on customer retention of Hotels in Taraba State Nigeria specifically to:

1. examine the effect of service tangibility on customer retention of hotels in Taraba state
2. examine the effect of employees' receptiveness on customer retention of hotel in Taraba state
3. determine the effect of service assurance on customer retention of hotels in Taraba state.

Research Questions

1. to what extent does service tangibility affect customer retention of hotels in Taraba state?
2. to what extent does employees 'receptiveness affect customer retention of Hotels in Taraba state?
3. to what extent does service assurance affect customer retention of hotels in Taraba state?

Research Hypotheses

$H0_1$: Service tangibility does not significantly affect customer retention of hotels in Taraba state

$H0_2$: Employees 'receptiveness does not significantly affect customer retention of hotels in Taraba state

$H0_3$: Service assurance does not significantly affect customer retention of hotels in Taraba state

Literature Review

Service Quality

Service quality is crucial for a company's success, as it is the intangible aspect of a transaction connection that provides value between a provider business and its customers (Barusman et al., 2020; Momotaz, 2016; Nguyen et al., 2015; Salem, 2021; Sari & Mugiono, 2018). It can mean "Work done for others" or "aid given to another." while service quality refers to the perceived worthiness or superiority of a service, which can lead to repeat buyers, increased spending, and reduced price-sensitivity. The quality of a guest's experience is the gap between their expectations and actual occurrence, ensuring a positive experience for the company(Ford et al., 2012). Service quality is also the customers' perception of an organization's superiority or inferiority in services (Venetis & Ghauri, 2006). It is a widely studied construct in service marketing, evaluating how well a company meets customer requirements and satisfaction (Edward & Sahadev, 2011; Fullerton, 2014; Parawansa, 2016).

Positive evaluations benefit businesses, while negative ones indicate potential issues. Both process and output quality levels are evaluated by customers (Alkitbi et al., 2021; Blery et al., 2009; Syaqirah & Faizurrahman, 2014). Consumers worldwide appreciate high-quality service in both universal and specific ways. It is crucial in service-based industries like hospitality, banking, and entertainment, as it differentiates businesses and maintains customer loyalty (Alketbi et al., 2020; Allan, 2016). Studies show that excellent service is valued for attracting new customers and expanding market share (Venetis & Ghauri, 2006).

A company's ability to maintain and grow its clientele relies on the quality of service it provides. Long-term customers are less price sensitive and willing to pay higher prices, contributing to profitability (Barusman et al., 2020; Ennew & Binks, 1996; Sari & Mugiono, 2018). Management in the service industry aims to provide superior service, boost reputation, increase customer loyalty, repeat business, and bring in new consumers through positive word of mouth (Alketbi et al., 2020). Hotel Service providers' dedication, customer-centricity culture, targeted marketing campaign, and identification of switching barriers contribute to higher service quality and customer retention in the hospitality industry. service quality is influenced by various factors, including intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, empathy, reliability, responsiveness,

assurance and physical features (Amin et al., 2013; Lu, 2006; Nguyen et al., 2015; Parawansa, 2016).

Intangible services lack measurable quality, potential for variation, perceived short shelf life, and impossibility of storing or reusing. Lehtinen & Lehtinen (1982) break down service quality into physical, interaction, and corporate quality. Parasuraman et al. (1985) proposed the "GAP MODEL" to determine service quality by analyzing ten key factors that contribute to customer opinions. Their five-factor model, SERVQUAL, measures consumers' perceived service quality by narrowing the dimensions into reliability, responsiveness, tangibles, assurance, and empathy. This research explores the hotel industry using Parasuroman's model to assess service quality and predict customer retention (Alkitbi et al., 2021; Hamilton-Ibama et al., 2022; Parawansa, 2016).

Service tangibility

Service tangibility is measured by physical structures, staff appearance, supplies, ambience, and accessibility (Amin et al., 2013; Ennew & Binks, 1996; Zeitham et al, 2006). Visual cues like building condition, staff friendliness, and message clarity also contribute to service quality (Al-gharaibah, 2020; Antony et al., 2004; Hamilton-Ibama et al., 2022; Parasuman, et al, 1991). Customer satisfaction and loyalty are directly tied to the quality and timeliness of service provided.

Employees Responsiveness

Similarly, research Barusman et al (2020) shows that a greater impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty can be achieved by being attentive to customers' demands. The ability to respond quickly and effectively to the needs of customers is a sign of a service culture built on responsiveness. Customer satisfaction is directly tied to the quality and timeliness of service provided in the service sector. When a company consistently meets or exceeds customer expectations, they earn price change inertia. Employees' responsiveness, as demonstrated by their capacity to receive, analyse, and rapidly display concerns, responses, feedback, inquiries, and requests from the client, reveals how the company treats its clients and influences the likelihood that a customer will repurchase or return to patronage them.

Service Assurance

Similarly, the SERVQUAL model by Parasuraman et al. (1988) posits that assurance is a metric for gauging service quality. The assurance process evaluates the staff's knowledge and their ability to inspire confidence in their consumers. Employees' affability, constant politeness, and knowledge of the proper answers to customer concerns all contribute to a positive customer service experience. Consumers typically look to employees for comfort, and they expect employees to convey and demonstrate confidence (Sugiarto & Octaviana, 2021).

The goal of any service provider should be to inspire confidence in their clientele. After that is taken care of, the firm will get customers back on board. Any service provider worth its salt would prioritise employee assurance above all else. The theoretical confirmation of the validity of service quality assurance contains a wide range of potential for hotel services in the hospitality industry. But how far have companies actually gone in practise to guarantee the execution that would result in service quality assurance? This enquiry is also one of the driving forces behind the present study

Customers Retention

This extensive research has led marketing professionals to the conclusion that increasing client loyalty depends on gaining high ratings for service quality (Fullerton, 2014). Keeping consumers returning to a firm is what many experts call customer retention (Alshamsi et al., 2021). Customer retention is synonymous with "retaining customers," due to the fact that acquiring new customers could be more expensive than keeping a current one (Alketbi et al., 2020). Customers who are kept as clients make more repeat purchases or patronage, bring in more new clients, require less time from service providers, and are less sensitive to pricing changes. Customer retention refers to the measures taken by businesses to keep their current clientele rather than having them defect to competitors (Hamilton-Ibama et al., 2022).

Customer retention is a topic that's received a lot of attention in the relationship marketing literature. One of the most central notions in this area is that it is more cost-effective for businesses to retain their current clientele rather than seek out new ones (Fullerton, 2014; Ngacha & Onyango, 2017). The success and profitability of a service can be gauged, in part, by the rate at which its customers remain subscribed to its offerings over time. This is on account of the fact that it precedes customers' feelings of contentment (Parawansa, 2016). Customers need to be retained

rather than only acquired as the hotel industry develops and competition increases (Schulz & Omweri, 2012).

As a marketing objective, retaining clients entails preventing them from switching to a rival. Testing for client loyalty and the likelihood of future purchases is at the heart of this analysis (Parawansa, 2016). Emotional and cognitive retention constructs (such as like, identification, commitment, and trust) and behavioral intent (such as desire to suggest and repurchase) are used to illustrate consumer retention (Alketbi et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2011). It's important to remember that loyalty on both ends of the transaction is necessary for a healthy business connection. In the context of customer retention, businesses double down on service quality and marketing to keep customers from defecting, and people resolve to stick with their favored brand through thick and thin, no matter what life throws at them (Syaqirah & Faizurrahman, 2014). Thus, customer retention can be defined as the rate at which a firm's current customers continue to buy from the company and the rate at which those buyers recommend the company's products and services to others. Customers can be retained in the long run if the business consistently delivers exceptional service (Barusman et al., 2020). With the support of customer loyalty and brand loyalty campaigns, businesses may keep as many consumers as possible (Hamilton-Ibama et al., 2022).

Benefit of Customer Retention

Staying clients not only increase a hotel's worth, but also reduce expenses and boost earnings (Alketbi et al., 2020; Parawansa, 2016). The success and expansion of a hotel depends on its ability to maintain a steady stream of satisfied guests. It is the responsibility of the hotel to consistently provide its guests with all they require. Additionally, keeping consumers not only increases the likelihood that they would patronize the firm again, but also that they will spread the word about it to their friends and family (Han & Sean, 2015; Parawansa, 2016).

Factors Influencing Customer Retention

When it comes to the hospitality and tourist industry, customer retention is viewed as one of the finest strategies to create long-term connections with guests and reduce customer churn (Salem, 2021). Customers' impressions of a hotel, according to Imrie and Mphil (2000), are made up of

both concrete and nebulous elements. Any one of these aspects may leave a guest with a positive or negative impression, ultimately influencing their decision to book another stay at the hotel in question. The interplay of a number of factors makes this possible. Schulz and Omweri (2012) reference research from Kotler and Armstrong (2006), who state that in the hospitality industry, a focus on providing excellent service is one of the most important differentiating elements that can increase repeat business and positive word-of-mouth.

The literature on customer loyalty and retention in the hotel business discusses service quality at length because of the high risk of service failure and the enormous impact it has on consumers' opinions of a hotel (Imrie & Mphil, 2000). Companies can gauge how likely their customers are to return by monitoring metrics including customer commitment, value creation, advocacy, willingness to buy again, loyalty, relationship marketing, and defection(Al-tit, 2016; Alketbi et al., 2020; Allan, 2016; Alshamsi et al., 2021; Khan, 2013; Tawinunt et al., 2015).

Nexus of Service Quality and Customer Retention

Many studies have investigated the link between service quality, customer satisfaction, and CRM, all of which have been found to positively affect customer retention (e.g., Al-Qeed et al., 2017; Alketbi et al., 2020; Allan, 2016; Amin et al., 2013; Barusman et al., 2020; Parawansa, 2016; Salem, 2021). Recommendations, repeat business, and a higher price point are just few of the many outcomes that can be influenced by excellent service (Fullerton, 2014; Venetis & Ghauri, 2006). If a firm is looking at customer retention via the lens of future purchases, then is using consumer behavior intentions as a metric (Venetis & Ghauri, 2006). The longevity of a customer relationship cannot be reliably predicted by a client's short-term intent to stay or go (Fam et al., 2021; Venetis & Ghauri, 2006). Rather than remaining static, relationships evolve as time goes on. It is difficult to foretell the future of a relationship without considering its context and history (Al-Gharaibah, 2020; Venetis and Ghauri, 2006; Sim et al., 2006). Existing partnerships in the business services industry (Venetis & Ghauri, 2006; Fam et al., 2021) demonstrate that partnerships are more than a collection of transactions. A number of studies (Ennew & Binks, 1996; Sim et al., 2006; Simanjuntak et al., 2020) support this notion. The hope is that if a firm put money into fostering stronger client relationships and providing better service, it will see a rise in both customer loyalty

and revenue. Business professionals and academics can rest easy knowing that superior customer service always results in returning clients. Instead, they must determine what causes the association, how strong it is, and why it matters (Fullerton, 2014). According to Zeithaml et al. (1996), the importance of service quality to a company's bottom line can be attributed to two main reasons: first, the belief that it is one of the few ways to differentiate services and gain a competitive edge, thereby attracting new customers and increasing market share. Long-term success in today's cutthroat marketplace necessitates establishing and maintaining solid customer connections through attentive and helpful service. If a customer is retained, it signifies that they and the business are committed to continuing their relationship throughout time (Wilson, 1995). As a result, satisfied customers are more likely to return when the service they receive is of higher quality (Al-Gharaibah, 2020; Fam et al., 2021; Hamilton-Ibama et al., 2022; Imrie & Mphil, 2000; Khan, 2013).

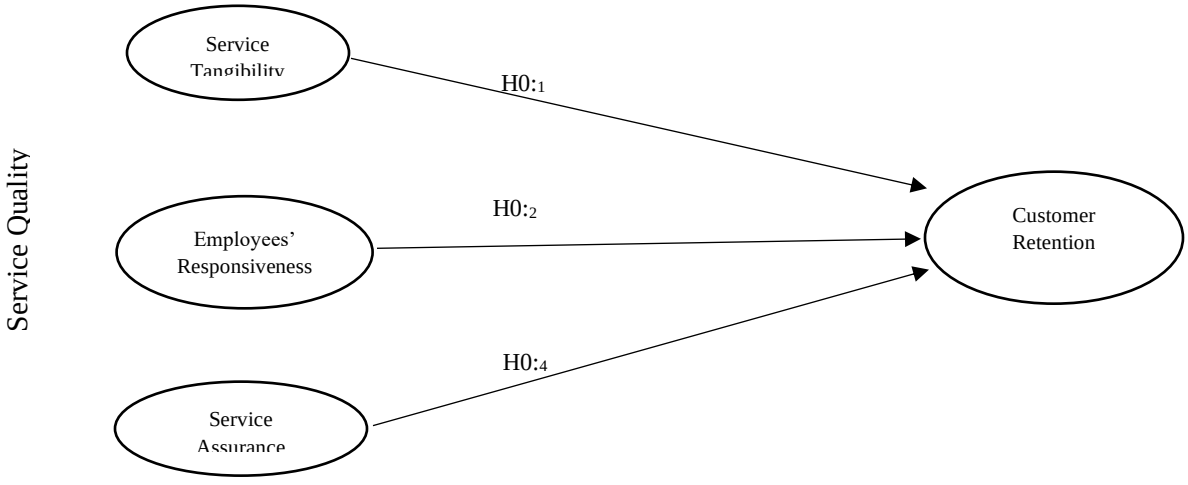

Figure 2: Model of the Conceptual Framework
Source: The researcher's Conceptualization

3.0 Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design where primary data of the population of 244, 000 hotel customers in Taraba state were surveyed. The sample of 399 was selected using Taro Yamane statistical method. The participants were randomly selected and 388 out of the sample of 399 questionnaires were retrieved and analyzed using multiple regression analytical tool at 0.05 level of significance. To ensure the correctness of the instrument in measuring what it was intended, it was subjected to face validity while Cronbach Alpha reliability method was employed to ensure internal consistencies of the instrument. The null hypothesis whose p-value is greater than 0.05 was upheld; otherwise rejected.

Model Specification: $CR = \beta_0 + \beta_1 ST + \beta_2 ER + \beta_3 SA + \beta_4 SE + \beta_5 SR + e$

4.1 Result and Discussions

The study aimed at determining the effect of service tangibility, employees 'receptiveness and service assurance on customer retention, it then, proposed these hypotheses: $H0_1$: service tangibility does not significantly affect customer retention of Hotels in Taraba State $H0_2$: employees 'receptiveness does not significantly affect customer retention of Hotels in Taraba State and $H0_3$: service assurance does not significantly affect customer retention of Hotels in Taraba State.

Table 1: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis

Hypotheses	Regression Weights	β	t	p-value	results
$H0_1$	ST – CR	.664	9.492	.000*	S
$H0_2$	ER - CR	.166	2.103	.036*	S
$H0_3$	SA - CR	.224	2.815	.005*	S
R^2	.406				
F(3, 388)	87.441				

Note: p<0.05* ST Service tangibility, ER Employees' responsiveness, AS service assurance

The dependent variable (customer retention) was regressed on predicting variables (service tangibility, employees' responsiveness and service assurance). The independent variables significantly affect performance, f (3,383) =87.441, p>0.00*, p>0.036* and p>0.005* which indicate that three predicting variables have significant effect on customer retention. Moreover, the R^2=.406 depicts that the model explains 40.6% of the variance on customer retention.

Additionally, coefficients were further examined to ascertain the effect of each of the factors on the criterion variable (Customer retention). The result of regression of $H0_1$ shows statistically positively significant (β= .664, t= 9.492, p= .000). The result of regression of $H0_2$ shows statistically positively significant (β=.166, t=2.103, p= .036). And the result of regression of $H0_3$ shows statistically positively significant (β= .224, t=2.815, p= .005).

The finding of this study in Hypothesis 1 shows that there is a positively significant effect of service tangibility on customer retention. This means that factors such as the appearance of physical facilities, employees' neatness, seat comfortability, and room decoration positively affect customer retention in hotels in Taraba State. The finding concurs with the findings of (Al-Gharaibah, 2020) who found that PE, SQ, PCV, and CS were important predictors of CR.

The finding of this study in Hypothesis 2 shows that there is a positively significant effect of an employee's responsiveness on customer retention. Meaning that the hotel employees are willing to help customers, respond promptly, and give feedback on their inquiries. The finding is in congruence with the findings of (Kang et al., 2016; Salama & Abdelkawi, 2022; Lee, 2017 (Joemsittiprasert et al., 2019; Yoo, 2019; Jang, Jeong-Hoon, 2018; Negassa & Japee, 2023) who found that bonding and responsiveness were seen to have an indirect but significant effect on customer retention via customer satisfaction.

The findings of this study in Hypothesis 3 show there is a positively significant effect of service assurance on customer retention. The implication is that being friendly when approaching customers and being polite to them, will positively affect their retention. The finding agrees with the findings and views of (Negassa & Japee, 2023; Pahrudin et al., 2023; Al-Tit, 2015; Mukherjee & Sharma, 2019; Elgarhy, 2022) who found that positive word of mouth plays a critical role in encouraging customers to use the services of the service provider again.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of service quality on customer retention. Based on the results of the study, the study concludes that service quality—service tangibility, employees' responsiveness, and service assurance to customers—affects their retention positively. The study makes the following recommendations:

1. Hotels should improve service quality delivery in the areas of service tangibility: appearance of physical facilities, employees' appearance, comfortable seating, idyllic rooms, and parking space, because these will appeal to customers and make them remember the hotel.
2. As a matter of priority, employees should be trained in the area of their responsiveness to customers needs by being willing, prompt to attend to them.
3. The hotel employees and management should always ensure that confidence is assured to customers to make them remember the hotel for future patronage.

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