Original Research Article

Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction in Resort Hotels in Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated service quality and customer satisfaction in resorts hotels. The primary objective of the study is to examine the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in resort hotels in the south-east, Nigeria. In line with the purposes of the study, three hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. A quasi-experimental research design was adopted. The sample size comprised of three hundred and eighty-four (384) adult guests who visited the selected resort hotels in the South-East Region of Nigeria. A structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale was used for data collection. Percentages and frequency were used in analyzing demographic information of the respondents, while means and standard deviation were for responses to questionnaire items. Spearman Rank Order Correlation was used to test the formulated hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that a significant relationship exists between tangibility, reliability, responsiveness dimensions of service quality and customer satisfaction in resort hotels in South-East, Nigeria. The study concludes that when the quality of service is improved in resort hotels, it enhances customer satisfaction. Also, the level of awareness towards the importance and benefits of service quality will put managers of resort hotels to be up and doing to increase customer satisfaction, retention and loyalty. The study, therefore, recommends amongst others that; hotels should always make the first experience of any customer exciting and unforgettable to make the customer wanting to return; Management of hotels should hire enthusiastic employees who would like to deal with the customer nicely and try to solve customer complaints and other issues in an effective manner. This will build the confidence of the customer about the hotel, hence, opening opportunities for more patronage.
Keywords: Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Resort Hotels, Lodging Quality Index.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

    Service quality has become an integral strategic factor for differentiating products and services from that of competitors (Eshetic, Seyoum & Ali, 2016; Alemnh & Gebremichael, 2018). Many researchers have made known the role of quality services to increase market share, customer satisfaction, responsiveness towards customer order, customer retention and loyalty, greater return on investment and lowers production cost (Alemneh & Gebremichael, 2018; Ali, 2015; Eshetic, Seyoum & Ali, 2016; Mbuthia, Muthoni & Muchina, 2014; Alemneh, 2018; Bello & Majebi, 2018). Providing excellent services to the customers of resort hotels improves satisfaction of the customers, with the resultant effect on international

visitation, repeat visits of the same tourist destinations, customer loyalty and relationship commitment. Additionally, when tourists are satisfied and delighted, they spread positive word-of-mouth (WOM), thereby attracting new customers.

    The hotel industry in Nigeria has continuously contributed considerably to the growth of the economy through the retail and wholesale of a range of accommodation and related services (Bello & Majebi, 2018; Bello, Bello & Obiora, 2017; Bello, Udi, Bello & Raja, 2016). The industry expects to experience a surge in the number of hotel rooms 8,400 available in 2013 to about 24,000 rooms in 2018 (Bello & Majebi, 2018). This increase may accommodate the domestic tourists and ever-increasing international tourist arrivals to the country.

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Leisure tourism is recognized as tourism activities for recreational, educational, sightseeing, relaxing and other experienced purposes (Getz, 2008). It has been noticed that of recent, resort hotels have become one of the fastest growing section of leisure attractions and are snowballing in number, diversity and popularity. Various researchers believe that a large number of tourists both domestic and international, travel to resort hotels situated in exotic, serene and beautiful destinations to enjoy themselves and escape from their daily routines (Ali, 2015; Ali, Hussain & Ragavan, 2014; Walker, 2006; Yang & Chan, 2010). According to Gee (2000), the creation of an atmosphere or environment that will promote and enhance a feeling of wellbeing and enjoyment is at the core of resort concept. Also, Gee (2000) cited in Ali, (2015) pinpoints the following as the nature of a resort hotel: (i) ample indoor amenities comprising quality services, pleasant physical ambience, convenient entertainment and other facilities, and (ii) unique location in terms of climate, scenery and recreational attractions.

The knowledge of customer satisfaction and the resulting behavioural intentions are turning out to be essential these days in the service industries, particularly in the travel and tourism industry. In today's business environment, customer satisfaction has a significant influence on the future of any firms. Valdani (2009) opines that firms exist and prosper because they have customers they serve (customer retention). Globally, customers in the lodging industry are increasingly becoming more sophisticated and demanding. Andaleeb (1998) notes that firms that fail to understand the importance of delivering customer satisfaction may be inviting possible extinction. The understanding of customer satisfaction enables the hotel to know how customers define the service and products quality, facilitates the development of customer satisfaction questionnaire (Haye, 1997 as cited in Alemneh & Gebremichael, 2018). Thus, a better understanding of customer satisfaction enables the hotel to create value for her customers which influences repeat visitation and word of mouth recommendation (Berkman & Gilson, 1986.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The motive of every business is to create and serve their customers, but the biggest challenge faced by business is how to satisfy them, retain and ensure their loyalty for the lifetime of the business (Yen & Su, 2004). Service quality has been acknowledged by many researchers (Paliwal, Ankur & Kumar, 2018; Bucak, 2014) as a critical tool to customer satisfaction and repeats visit in the service-based businesses especially in hotels. Service quality plays a significant role in the service industry. Studies have found that there is a positive relationship between quality service and customer satisfaction, resulting to customer loyalty/retention and repeat customer purchase behaviour (Bello & Bello, 2016; Bello & Majebi, 2018;

Ali, 2015; Watiki, 2014; Bucak, 2014; Han & Omar, 2014; Bostaji, 2013; Rao & Sahu, 2013; Gumussoy & Koseoglu, 2016; Tessera, Hussain & Ahmad, 2016; Jasinskas, Stremikiene, Svagzdiene & Simanavicisu, 2016; Alemnah, 2018; Eshetie, Seyoum & Ali, 2016). When a customer feels satisfied, the customer pays less attention to other competing products, spends more time and buys more because of pleasant environmental stimuli (Hussain& Ali, 2015; Fatima & Rasheed, 2018; Mokwuah, 2018).

Many researchers have carried out studies on service quality using various marketing constructs and concepts. For instance; Watik (2014), studied service quality and customer satisfaction in hotels in Nairobi. Opuni, Opoku & Oseku-Afful (2014), examined the effect of relationship marketing on service quality and customer satisfaction in the hospitality sector in Ghana. Shing, Carolyn, & Robert (2012), worked on service quality dimensions and tourist satisfaction towards Melaka Hotels. From the literature, it is factual that research of this magnitude has not been carried out in Nigeria. Also, several scholars have carried out several studies with the aim of developing models of measurement that would help service organizations determine the extent to which their services are effective (Getty & Thompson, 1994; O'Neil et. al., 2010).

Meanwhile, a review of literature in the Nigeria context reveals a limited investigation in the area of service quality and customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry. Bello and Majebi (2018), conducted a study on lodging quality index approach: exploring the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in the hotel industry; Igwe and Kalu (2017) examined the service innovativeness and customer satisfaction of Four Star Hotels in Rivers State; Nduka, Okocha and Chris-Nnamchi (2017) worked on diagnostics of customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry: Evidence from Nigeria. Gambo (2016) investigated service quality and customer satisfaction among domestic air passengers in Nigeria. However, none of these studies focused on how service quality dimensions influence customer satisfaction with the application of lodging quality index for hotels in the south-east, Nigeria.

In the light of the above, the benefits of the application of Lodging Quality Index Approach in the marketing of resort hotel services in the South-East Nigeria could also improve the level of customer satisfaction. Incidentally, empirical literature in the area of service quality and customer satisfaction of resort hotels in Nigeria is very scanty due to limited research in this aspect. As a result, there is a need to fill the knowledge gap in the existing literature. Juliet & Robert (2003) investigate Lodging Quality Index (LQI); Assessing Customer Perceptions of Quality Delivery, using tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, confidence

and communication as dimensions for service quality; the researchers thus intend to adopt the framework to check its effects in the Nigeria context in filling the gap in the literature. It is alongside this backdrop that the researchers intend to investigate service quality and customer satisfaction of resort hotels in South-East Nigeria using Lodging Quality Index (LQI) Approach.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in resort hotels in South East, Nigeria, using the Lodging Quality Index. Specifically, the research work strives to:

1. Ascertain the extent of the relationship between tangibility dimension of service quality and customer satisfaction in resort hotels.
2. Evaluate the relationship between the reliability dimension of service quality and customer satisfaction in resort hotels.
3. Assess the relationship between the responsiveness dimension of service quality and customer satisfaction in resort hotels.

Research Questions

Based on the objectives of the study, the following questions are postulated:

1. To what extent does the tangibility dimension of service quality affect customer satisfaction in resort hotels?
2. To what extent does reliability dimension of service quality affect customer satisfaction in resort hotels?
3. To what extent does responsiveness dimension of service quality have an impact on customer satisfaction in resort hotels?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated for the purpose of the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between tangibility dimension of service quality and customer satisfaction in resort hotels.
2. There is no significant relationship between the reliability dimension of service quality and customer satisfaction in resort hotels.
3. There is no significant relationship between the responsiveness dimension of service quality and customer satisfaction in resort hotels

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE
Concept of Service Quality

As a requisite for a company's offer to reach its customers, services are needed. These services are explained in many ways depending on where the term is being used. In other words, the usage of the term services within a context explains the service. American Society for Marketing defines service as "The activities or benefits offered for sale or offered due to its association with specific commodity" (Azzam, 2008, as cited in Bostanji, 2013). Kotler & Keller (2009) define service as "any activity or benefit provided by one party to another party which is intangible and does not lead to any ownership". Lovelock (2004) defines service as "perceived benefit by senses, either alone, or associated with something physical tangible and is interchangeable nor entail ownership, and mostly intangible". Zeithmanl (2000) argues that "services are acts, operations, and achievements or actions, therefore, services include all economic activities that their outputs are not physical products".

Quality is more than merely producing excellent product. Quality is a substantial factor for businesses in achieving competition nowadays. Most business executives would agree that sound business strategies include a concern for quality. That is why managers from different functional areas in a firm tend to view the idea of quality from a variety of perspectives. Quality is one of the attributes that consumers seek out for in an offer, of which service happens to be one. According to Kotler et al., 2009 quality is "the totality of features and characteristics of a product or services that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs". It is, therefore, palpable that quality can be linked to the value of an offer which could give rise to satisfaction or dissatisfaction on the part of the user. This is particularly true within the lodging industry where perceptions of quality are highly dependent on the human element.

The need for services has accompanied the need for quality service. People have been after getting the best of services they need and being satisfied. Also, everyone asks for the best of transport, education, health and tourism services they receive. Therefore, quality should be paid attention in services to be provided (Karahan, 2006). Quality is described as the measurement of how well the product or service of the organization conforms to the customer's wants and expectations. It can be viewed as the ability of the organization to meet or exceed customer expectation (Brink & Berndt, 2005).

Service quality is a multifaceted item to define, even in the developed economies (Jevon & Pidgeon, 2002). As shown in the studies, only customers can determine the quality of service, and this happens when goods and services supplied by an organization exceed customer's satisfaction (Mbise & Tuninga, 2013). That is to say, quality in service delivery lies on customer's judgment. Therefore, to ensure a high quality in service delivery Shalim (2010) opined that managers in the service sector must demonstrate that their services are customer-focused and that continuous performance improvement is being delivered.

Conceptual Framework for the Study

Based on the literature reviewed, a conceptual framework for the study was developed.
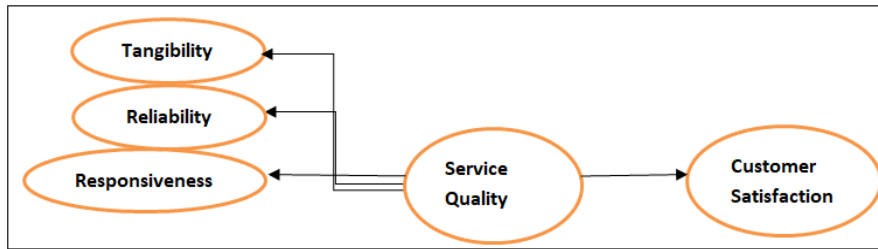
Figure 1: Conceptual framework on service quality dimensions and customer satisfaction
Source: Adopted from Juliet & Robert (2003) and Researchers Concept 2021

Service Quality Dimensions
Tangibility

Tangibles are likened to material features such as gadgets, equipment and how members of staff present themselves (Seo, 2012). This dimension takes in to view the facilities on ground and the supposed standard of materials, workforce and equipment in use by the service provider (Kandampully, 2007; Delgado & Ballester, 2004). The tangibility dimension of service quality refers to the appearance of the physical surroundings and facilities, equipment, personnel and their way of communication. That is to say; the tangible dimension is about creating first-hand impressions. Every company desires its customers to get a unique, positive and unforgettable first experience, making them more inclined to return in the future.

Reliability

Reliability is defined as the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. It is an accurate predictor of overall service quality as it relates to due completion of a task as promised, and the consistency in the provision of the correct service. Reliability is characterized as the trustworthiness, consistency, and exactness with which the service is rendered by the provider (Kandampully, 2007). The reliability dimension of service quality refers to how the company performs and completes its promised service, dependably and accurately within the agreed requirements between the company and the customer. It was found that customers were willing to tolerate delays or mistakes. They believed that reliability problems are solvable if the service providers are sincere and made their customers feel that they were never too busy to attend to their requests (Juwaheer, 2004).

Responsiveness

The readiness of an organization in rendering good, quality and swift service to its customers can be characterized as the responsiveness aspect of service quality. Responsiveness is an act of carrying out the service promptly and being available when the customer needs assistance (Edvardsson, 1998). This dimension is essential because each customer feels more valued when they receive the best possible quality in the service (Delgado & Ballester, 2004). This is associated with the enthusiasm in staff to serve customers in a prompt, efficient way, and it includes elements like

cooperativeness, gentleness and tenderness of the service staff (Kandampully, 2007). Customers desire the service provider to be responsive to their needs and demands in a patient and enthusiastic manner.

Customer Satisfaction

To improve the lifetime value of a customer, the focus should be placed on customer satisfaction (Kotler & Keller, 2006). Customer satisfaction is an indispensable part of service quality assessment since the higher the customer satisfaction, the higher the performance of a business (Morgan, Anderson & Mittal, 2005). Customer satisfaction can be ascertained via a product or service that is of good quality (Gunarathne, 2014). Clients' prior encounter of content or discontent is of the essence due to its impact on the anticipation of a person's purchase behaviour the next time (Gutierrez & Uribe, 2011). Thus, most literature in the hotel sector acknowledges customer satisfaction as an important constituent of the hotel sector's value position to the customer (Maghzi, Abbaspour, Eskandarian & Hamid, 2011).

At the period of extreme competition, businesses attempt to realize customer satisfaction. According to Vavra (1997), customer satisfaction is the foremost benchmark for defining the quality of service delivered to customers. It connotes response to the state of contentment

Customer satisfaction is a state which shows that the customer has achieved his needs, wants, and demands due to particular product or service and has the intention to repurchase (Aksar, Kayani & Ali, 2020). Customer satisfaction is an attitude of the customers about the services, whether these fulfill their requirements or otherwise. To satisfy the customer is an essential output of the marketing process. If the customers are satisfied with services provided by a specific organization, it means the stakeholders are doing their best in that particular organization (Choi & Kim, 2011). The motive behind the working for the satisfaction of the customer is to extend the growth of the business which ultimately maximizes the profit of the firm. The practices of customer satisfaction have a positive impact on the factors, which subsequently have their impact on the intentions of the customers for repurchasing (Aksar et al., 2020).

Relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction

The most important and crucial elements for growth and success of the business and maximizing the profit are service quality as well as customer satisfaction. Both the quality of the service and the satisfaction of the customers give their positive touch for retention of the customers and also helpful in taking competitive advantage (Dominici & Guzzo, 2010). , The success of the service providers depends upon the quality of the services which they provide. If they offer better services, it would eventually have a positive effect on the satisfaction as well as the loyalty of the customers (Panda, 2003). Therefore, successful service provider depends on the quality of the services, which creates customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Researchers have established that service quality is linked with customer satisfaction; that an increase in the quality of service will result in an increase in customer satisfaction (Sulieman, 2013; Malik, 2012). Companies and organizations strive hard to achieve high customer satisfaction, especially those companies that consider a long term relationship with customers as an asset. Sureshchandar, Rajendra and Anantharaman (2002) assess the relationship service quality and customer satisfaction possess and noticed a vast colony among the constructs, that, more of service quality leads to more satisfaction.

Fornell and Larcker (2015) opined that a causal relationship exists between service quality and customer's satisfaction, more so that the perceptions of service quality can affect the feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction by a customer. Customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction is formed by the experience of purchase and use of a service.

It is widely acknowledged that maintaining service quality at a certain level and improving service quality must be a firm's life-time Endeavour's to succeed in business (Tamilselvi, 2016). Customer satisfaction is often used as an indicator of whether customers will return to a hotel or destination. While there is no guarantee of a fulfilled customer's repeat visit, it is almost sure that disappointed customers will not return. Attributes of customer satisfaction ought to give clues regarding what action a hotelier needs to take to ensure that customers are fulfilled and willing to return (Domingo, 2002). At the point when tourists' expectations are met and surpassed by the hospitality and tourism operations, one can expect repeat business and positive word-of-mouth promotion. This is possible by building a strong brand image which is largely tied to service quality performance.

After conducting a study to establish the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction, Janet (2011) concludes that a significant relationship exist between service quality and customer satisfaction. All the dimensions of service quality were identified as the key factors influencing customer satisfaction. She suggested that to improve customer satisfaction and organizations need to improve the dimensions of service quality. Service quality and customer satisfaction are particularly important in the hospitality industry. This is because the hospitality industry is very sensitive to word of mouth communication. A non-satisfied customer does not usually express his/her dissatisfaction to the management but will tell his/her experience to nine to twenty persons, and this will influence the hotel's image and subsequent efforts to attract new customers.

Review of Related Theories and Models

This section presents some theoretical approaches and models for which this study is anchored on.

Theories and models are the general principles or ideas that relate to a particular subject. A particular theory or model is likely to explain a specific aspect of an individual's decision in a given context. However, no simple unifying theory or model has emerged across disciplines to describe, explain or predict consumer decisions (Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005).

Several theoretical approaches have been used to discuss and explain the relationship between satisfaction and service quality. Anderson (1978) identified four psychological theories: Assimilation, Contrast, Generalized Negativity, and Assimilation-Contrast. Meanwhile, four theoretical approaches have been advanced under consistency theory: Assimilation theory, Contrast theory, Assimilation-Contrast theory, and Negativity theory. Consistency theories suggest that when a customer's expectations and the actual service performance fail to match, some degree of tension arise. To relieve this tension, the customer will make adjustments either in expectations or in the perceptions of the product's actual performance. This study is based on the work of Peyton, Pitts, & Kamery (2003).

i. Assimilation Theory

Assimilation theory is based on dissonance theory of Festinger (1957). It posits that there is a cognitive correlation between expectations regarding a product and the perceived product performance by the consumer (Peyton, Pitts, & Kamery, 2003). This idea of consumer post usage assessment was introduced into the satisfaction literature via the assimilation theory (Anderson, 2000; 1973). Consumers seek to stay away from dissonance by adjusting perceptions regarding a given product to bring it more in line with expectations (Peyton et al., 2003). According to Olson and Dover (1979), the tension resulting from the difference between expectations and product performance can be reduced either by altering expectations to be in line with perceived product performance or upturn the level of

satisfaction by minimizing the relative importance of the disconfirmation experienced.

Several authors believe that the assimilation theory is flawed. Peyton *et al*., (2003) argue that the approach assumes that there is a correlation between expectation and satisfaction but comes short of specifying how disconfirmation of an expectation gives rise to either satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The theory also assumes that consumers are stirred to adjust either their expectations or their perceptions about the performance of the product and/or service.

Contrast Theory

Contrast theory was first mentioned in the literature by Hovland, Harvey and Sherif (1957). Contrast theory is defined as "the tendency to magnify the discrepancy between one's own attitudes and the attitudes represented by opinion statements" (Dawes, Singer & Lemons, 1972). According to Cardizo (1985), contrast theory provides an alternative view of the consumer post-usage evaluation process that was presented in assimilation theory in that post-usage evaluations result in opposite predictions for the effects of expectations on satisfaction. While assimilation theory postulates that consumers will seek to minimize the difference between expectation and performance, contrast theory submits that a surprise effect occurs leading to the difference being magnified or exaggerated (Peyton *et al*., 2003).

According to the contrast theory, if any discrepancy of experience from customer's expectations occurs, it will be exaggerated in the direction of the discrepancy. For instance, if a firm like a resort hotel raises expectations in its promotions, and then a customer's experience is slightly less than that promised, the product/service would be rejected as totally unsatisfactory. On the other hand, under-promising in promotion and out-performing will cause positive disconfirmation also to be exaggerated (Vavra, 1997).

Within the marketing literature, several works have given some backing for contrast theory. Contrast theory only foretells customer reaction instead of reducing dissonance. The customer will magnify the difference between expectation and the performance of the service (Olson & Dover, 1979).

Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory

The expectancy-disconfirmation theory emerged as the basis for satisfaction models (Rao & Sahu, 2013). The theory was developed by Oliver (1980), who suggested that satisfaction level is the outcome of the difference between expected and perceived performance. The theory implies that customers purchase goods and service with pre-purchase expectation about probable performance. The expectation level then becomes a standard against

which the product or service is judged. That is, outcomes are compared against expectation once the product or service has been used. If the outcome matches the expectation, confirmation occurs. Disconfirmation occurs where there is a discrepancy between expectation and outcomes.

A customer is either satisfied or dissatisfied as a result of the positive or negative difference between expectation and perception. Thus, when service performance is better than what the customer had initially anticipated, there is a positive disconfirmation between expectations and performance which results in satisfaction. In contrast, when service performance is as expected, there is confirmation between expectation and perception, which results in satisfaction. Similarly, a negative disconfirmation between expectations and perceptions, which causes dissatisfaction occurs when service performance is not as good as what the customer anticipated.

As applicable to the present study, the expectancy-disconfirmation theory suggests that the resort hotel customers would form expectation before arrival at the hotel. After that, the experience of the customer with the services offered by the hotel staff produces a level of perceived quality that is influenced by expectations. If the perceived performance is less than the customer's expectation, the customer is said to be dissatisfied. But if the perceived performance is as anticipated, the customer is considered satisfied. Resort hotel customers are said to be extremely satisfied when the perceived performance exceeds their expectation. Given the applicability of this theory to the present study, the expectancy-disconfirmation theory is considered suitable for the present study.

METHODOLOGY
Research Design
The study adopted the quasi-experimental research design, specifically, the cross-sectional research design. The quasi-experimental research design is apt for this study, as the respondents are not under the control of the researcher. The cross-sectional design will be employed since the research has to do with different locations. In this study, the cross-sectional research design of the quasi-experimental research design will be used. The cross-sectional research design will be utilized because the study is a descriptive study. Also, the cross-sectional design is a thorough analysis of a selected number of cases involving the analysis of interrelationships among several variables.

Area of the Study
The study was carried out in the South East Region of Nigeria comprising: Anambra State, Enugu State, and Imo State. These states are selected due to influx of both domestic and international tourists and visitors in the various states, such as business tourists,

MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibition) tourists, religious tourist and tourists for leisure. Resorts selected for the study include Crystal Lake Resorts and Tours, Oguta (Imo State), Nike Lake Resort (Enugu State), Golden Tulip Resort, Agulu (Anambra State) and Rojenny Tourist and Game Village (Anambra State). These resorts were selected based on reviews and scores on hotelsng.com.

Sample Size Determination

Due to the unknown nature of the population, the sample size of the study was determined using a formula for an unknown population as suggested by (Godden, 2004) as:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 PQ}{e^2}$$

Where:

n = Sample size

Z = Percentage point for the standard normal probability distribution at the specific confidence interval (e.g. Z value 1.96 for 95% confidence level).

P = Percentage of picking a choice.

Q = Percentage of not picking a choice (I – P)

e = Margin of error (5%)

$$n = \frac{Z^2 PQ}{e^2}$$

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5}{0.05^2}$$

$$n = \frac{3.8416 \times 0.5 \times 0.5}{0.025}$$

n = 384.2

Therefore, the sample size for the study will be 384 guests of selected resorts hotels in the South East, Nigeria.

Sample Frame

The sample frame of the resort hotels is based on the number of reviews and star-rating on hotelsng.com, the foremost Nigerian online hotel agency.

S/N	Name of Resort Hotels Selected	No. of Questionnaire to be Distributed
1.	Crystal Lake Resort & Tour	120
2.	Golden Tulip Resort	110
3.	Nike Lake Resort	77
4.	Rojenny Tourist Village	77
	Total	**384**

Method of Data Collection

For the purpose of gathering primary data, a structured questionnaire was constructed, taking into account service quality dimensions in line with lodging quality index. These dimensions include; tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, confidence, and communication. Items in the questionnaire were based on scales in previous relevant studies and lodging Quality Index (LQI). The questionnaire has two sections: Section A requires the respondent's demographic data and some general information while Section B is based on LODGING QUALITY INDEX, and customer satisfaction. A five (5) point Likert type scale ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1) was utilized.

Method of Data Analysis

This study employed the use of frequency and percentages, in answering research questions and demographic data of the respondents. The Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient was used in testing the hypotheses formulated in the study, at 0.05 level of significance. This technique (Spearman Rank Order Correlation) was utilized because it is more effective in determining whether two non-parametric data samples with ties are correlated. Also, it is used in analyzing ordinal data, such as this. The statistical package for social science (SPSS) version 23 was used in computing the data.

Testing of Hypotheses

The hypotheses stated in chapter one of this study were tested statistically in this section using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation. The result of the statistical testing was used to either accept or reject the null hypothesis formulated at 0.05 level of significance.

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between tangibility dimension of service quality and customer satisfaction in resort hotels in South-East Nigeria.

Table 1: Spearman Correlation between tangibility and customer satisfaction in resort hotels in South East Nigeria

Correlations			Tangibility	Customer Satisfaction
Spearman's rho	Tangibility	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.770**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	365	365
	Customer Satisfaction	Correlation Coefficient	.770**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	365	365
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

From table 1, the correlation coefficient (r = 0.771) between tangibility and customer satisfaction in resort hotels in South-East Nigeria is strong and positive. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.593$) indicates that 59.3% change in customer satisfaction in resort hotels in South-East Nigeria can be explained by tangibility. The significant value of 0.000 (p< 0.01) reveals a significant relationship. Based on that, the null

hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between tangibility dimension of service quality and customer satisfaction in resort hotels in South-East Nigeria.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between the reliability dimension of service quality and customer satisfaction in resort hotels in South-East Nigeria.

Table 2: Spearman Correlation between reliability and customer satisfaction in resort hotels in South-East Nigeria

Correlations			Reliability	Customer Satisfaction
Spearman's rho	Reliability	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.743**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	365	365
	Customer Satisfaction	Correlation Coefficient	.743**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	365	365
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

From Table 2, the correlation coefficient (r = 0.743) between reliability and customer satisfaction in resort hotels in South-East Nigeria is strong and positive. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.552$) indicates that 55.2% change in customer satisfaction in resort hotels in South-East Nigeria can be explained by reliability. The significant value of 0.000 (p< 0.01) reveals a significant relationship. Based on that, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, there is a significant

relationship between the reliability dimension of service quality and customer satisfaction in resort hotels in South-East, Nigeria.

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between the responsiveness dimension of service quality and customer satisfaction in resort hotels in South-East Nigeria.

Table 3: Spearman Correlation between responsiveness and customer satisfaction in resort hotels in South-East Nigeria

Correlations			Responsiveness	Customer Satisfaction
Spearman's rho	Responsiveness	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.855**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	365	365
	Customer Satisfaction	Correlation Coefficient	.855**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	365	365
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

From table 3, the correlation coefficient (r = 0.855) between responsiveness and customer satisfaction in resort hotels in South-East Nigeria is strong and positive. The coefficient of determination (r^2

= 0.731) indicates that 73.1% change in customer satisfaction in resort hotels in South-East Nigeria can be explained by responsiveness. The significant value of 0.000 (p< 0.01) reveals a significant relationship. Based

on that, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between the responsiveness dimension of service quality and customer satisfaction in resort hotels in South-East Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings and Implications
Tangibility and Customer Satisfaction
The findings revealed a significant relationship between tangibility and customer satisfaction. This was validated by the fact that the front desk employee was visually appealing, they had a clean and neat uniform, the restaurant's atmosphere was inviting, their shops were pleasant and attractive, outdoor surroundings were visually attractive, the hotel was bright and well lighted, hotel's interior and exterior were well maintained, and the hotel was clean. Also, they were satisfied with their decision to stay in the resort hotel, their choice to stay in this resort hotel is a wise one, and their experience with this resort was enjoyable.

Veasna (2013) analyzed the factors that might influence hotel guest satisfaction in Cambodia's hotel industry. Using a sample of 608 respondents, it is found that hotel guests' expectations are greater than the perceived performance of hotels across all attributes of the dimensions. His findings showed that six dimensions (tangibility, empathy, responsiveness, reliability, core hotel benefits, and assurance) have a significant, positive impact on the overall satisfaction of hotel guests, with tangibility dimension being the most important predictor of hotel guest satisfaction. The finding agrees with the present study. This implies that they more feeling of contentment derived from the customers, the more satisfied they are, towards the quality of service rendered to them in the hotel. When hotels make the first experience of any customer interesting and unforgettable, the customers tend to always come back.

Reliability and Customer Satisfaction
The findings revealed a significant relationship between reliability and customer satisfaction. This was validated by the fact that their reservation was handled efficiently; the guest room was ready as promised, TV, telephone, AC, lights, sockets, showers and sinks worked properly, and they got what they paid for. Also, they were satisfied with their decision to stay in the resort hotel, their choice to stay in this resort hotel is a wise one, and their experience with this resort was enjoyable.

Minh, Nguyen, Phan and Yoshiki (2015) studied service quality and customer satisfaction: A case study of hotel industry in Vietnam. Survey questionnaire was conducted with 23 service quality items covering five service quality dimensions based on the SERVQUAL model. Data were collected from 432 guests of 33 three-star hotels in Vietnam. The result indicated that reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and

empathy significantly impact on customer satisfaction. This study is similar to the present research, and their result agrees with the outcome of the present study. This implies that when hotels perform and complete its promised service, dependably and accurately within the agreed requirements, the customer is most likely to be satisfied and, will wish to patronize them again. In other words, when the hotel providers prove their trustworthiness by fulfilling all their agreement/promise, the customers can then have a feeling of satisfaction.

Responsiveness and Customer Satisfaction
The findings revealed a significant relationship between responsiveness and customer satisfaction. This was validated by the fact that employees respond promptly to their requests, informative literature about the hotel is usually provided, employees were willing to answer their questions, employees responded quickly to solve their problems and room service was prompt. Also, they were satisfied with their decision to stay in the resort hotel, their choice to stay in this resort hotel is a wise one, and their experience with this resort was enjoyable.

Bostanji (2013) examined the impact of service quality (quick responsiveness, empathy and tangibility) on customer's loyalty in five stars hotels. The study revealed that there was a strong impact of service quality (quick responsiveness, empathy and tangibility) on customer's loyalty in five stars hotels in Riyadh. This explains the importance of responsiveness towards customer satisfaction. This assertion agrees with the findings of the present study. The study implies that service quality plays a vital role as a driver for a high customer satisfaction level in hotel service. This means that managers should focus on responsiveness, in other to achieve a high degree of customer satisfaction, which can possibly lead to customer loyalty and business profit.

Summary
Drawing from the discussion of findings, the following summary was deduced;
(a) There is a significant relationship between tangibility dimension of service quality and customer satisfaction in resort hotels in South-East Nigeria.
(b) There is a significant relationship between the reliability dimension of service quality and customer satisfaction in resort hotels in South-East, Nigeria.
(c) There is a significant relationship between the responsiveness dimension of service quality and customer satisfaction in resort hotels in South-East, Nigeria.

CONCLUSION
From the findings of the study, the conclusion is reached. In this case, the study has filled the gap in

the literature by providing the knowledge base that when the quality of service is improved in resort hotels; it enhances customer satisfaction. Also, the research has proven that tangibility, reliability and responsiveness can increase customer satisfaction among customers of resort hotels. Furthermore, the level of awareness towards the importance and benefits of service quality will put managers of resort hotels to be up and doing, to increase customer satisfaction, retention and loyalty.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Based on the conclusion of this study, the following are recommended;

1. Hotels should always make the first experience of service tangibility by any customer enjoyable and unforgettable; in order to make customers still wanting to come back.
2. In order for hotels to provide reliable services close to their expectations, employees' training is highly needed, as it will aid in strengthening the culture of service quality which are key factors to customer satisfaction.
3. Management of hotels should hire self-motivated, enthusiastic employees who will like to deal with the customer nicely and would try to solve customer complaints and other issues in a responsive manner. This will build the confidence of the customers about the hotels, hence, opening opportunities for more patronage.

Contribution to Knowledge
The study has bridged the gap in service quality and customer satisfaction literature by providing an elaborate view of the interactive relationship between tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, confidence and communication on customer satisfaction in resort hotels in South-East, Nigeria. Competitive spirit has been stirred among hotels, towards improving their service quality for more customer satisfaction, retention and loyalty. The findings of the study have made a meaningful impact on people in business, especially hotels, having seen the key factors responsible for service quality. The outcome has brought to the knowing and understanding of hotel managers and employees on the importance of service quality as a veritable tool in customer satisfaction. It has formed a good reference material for researchers and academics in the field of marketing, commerce, industries etc.

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