

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The hospitality sector of Nigeria has increasingly assumed a crucial role in the country's economy, consequently playing a dominant role in creating value. The value creation ultimately influences to a large extent, the purchasing patterns of consumers and managerial decisions of the providers of these services. For the sector, particularly the hotels sector to maintain dominance and improve financial performance, the hotels must strive hard to exceed customers' expectations regarding the provision of quality service delivery (Goyit & Nmadu, 2016).

Researchers have relied heavily on customer satisfaction and quality ratings gathered from various surveys on performance monitoring, compensation as well as resource allocation (Bolton, 1998). Several researchers Swan and Trawick (1981), Churchill and Surprenant, (1982) and Bearden and Teel (1983) like began to investigate further the determinants of customer satisfaction. Rust and Zahorik (1993) and Bolton (1998) revealed that organizations and researchers began to be increasingly concerned about the financial outcomes of their customer satisfaction as early as in 1990s. There appears to be a gap in the literature on the service quality delivery specifically regarding Nigerian hospitality industry. There is therefore a need to explore in detail the strategies for sustainable services quality delivery in hotels in Nigeria.

Different strategies are formulated to retain the customer and the key of it is to increase the service quality level. Parasuraman et. al (1985) and Zeithaml et., al (1990) observed that the key strategy for the success and survival of any business organization is the ability to deliver quality services to customers. The quality of services offered will determine customer satisfaction and long term loyalty (Naik et al. 2010).

Parasuraman et al. (1985) as well revealed that the customer's perception of service quality depends on the range of gap distance between the customer expects before receive a service in a service centre and what he or she actually perceive after see and use the service by their own. Thus, service quality is in fact defined as the gap between customers' expectation of service and their perception of the service experience. A service quality gap exists when there are shortfall occur in which the service provider would like to close (Bitner 1994). Taking for instance, insufficient of sales, planning procedures and marketing research, organization do not focus on the demand quality, unsystematic service development service, lack of personnel training and so forth.

Service quality has therefore become a major area of attention for researchers and professionals because of

its enormous impact on customers' satisfaction and performance of firms. For example, Brown and Swartz (1989) argued that the clients prefer and value companies that provide high service quality. Customers judge service quality about what they want by comparing their perceptions of service experiences with their expectations of what the service performance should be. According to Wang (2005), good service quality offering is the key issue to survive in the intensely competitive market, especially maintaining customer satisfaction. The importance of tourism could manifest through its role via revenue and foreign exchange generation, a preserver of cultures and historical heritage, a promoter of national development and a vital and crucial factor of employment opportunities. Where tourism is concerned, hotels are the first concern of all tourists. In Nigeria, tourism is ever growing, and customers are becoming more demanding (Al-Rousan and Badaruddin, 2010). They demand better services and start to demand total service quality. The link between service actions and service quality has verified its importance in marketing (Heskett and Sasser, 2010; Hutchinson, Lai and Wang, 2009).

There has been a dramatic surge in focusing attention on quality issues by firms globally which resulted from the quality philosophy that has emerged as a major determining factor in the choice, purchase, and consumption of hotel services (Goyit, 2015). Thus, placement of increased emphasis on service quality by operators in the Hotel sector centers on achieving customer satisfaction (Ivanauskiene & Volungenaites, 2014). Further still, Ivanauskiene and Volungenaites (2014) opine that creation of new markets, protection and development of market shares, and surviving the competition so as to enhance customer loyalty, foreign exchange generation and exposure to long-term financial performance, survival and success in the Sector (Ivanauskiene & Volungenaites, 2014). Again, this has indirect impact on the economy of its host community through its boost on the existence and survival of support tourists' facilities like; the transport sector, tour guides, arts and craftsmen, food and beverages industry, security agencies, restaurants, drinking spots, club houses and the local market men and women who all benefit from the multiplier effect of the tourists' presence whose duration of stay depends on the quality of services and facilities rendered by the hotels.

In Gambia, for instance, 30% of the workforce depends directly or indirectly on tourism; while about 83% of workforce in the Maldives, 21% in the Seychelles, and 34% in Jamaica also work in the tourism sector. Malta's high dependence on tourism and a limited number of export products make its trade performance vulnerable to shifts in international demand. Nigeria cannot be left out in this strive towards economic growth through hotel development as its hospitality industry has shown tremendous strength in the aspect of human resources and structural development and also recognizing the fact that the dependence of the

country's economy is gradually shifting from the oil sector to the tourism industry. The main thrust of hospitality provision is the guest satisfaction through service excellence. However, hospitality industries like hotels have always focused on the result of customers' desires; that is service excellence, paying lesser attention to employees' needs, not realizing the key fact that employees are the key to service excellence (Valerie, Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Leonard 1990). Hotel employees, often work long hours but are paid meager salaries and have very few incentives to motivate them, thus threatening the achievement of service excellence and hence (financial) performance in the hospitality industry (Atkinson & Williams, 2003). Employees who are not motivated with incentives to encourage them will not be poised to provide the required standard of service and that will impact negatively on financial performance. It is in this view that this study examines the strategies for sustainable service quality delivery in hotels in Nigeria.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In an intensely competitive scenario such as the hotel sector in Nigeria, a proper understanding of the needs, wants and expectations of the customers by the service providers is of paramount importance for growth, success, and profitability. In view of this therefore, studies on service predictors such as prompt and timely attention to customers by employees, provision of prompt services especially at the front office, timely check-in or check-out, willingness to help customers, display of ability to perform the promised services dependably and accurately, quick resolution of customers complaints, demonstration of knowledge and courtesy that is capable of inspiring trust and confidence in customers and other similar actions capable of building good reputation and superior performance are of vital importance.

The reality of the scenario in the hotels in Nigeria portrays the contrary as studies by scholars such as Olaleke (2010) indicated that poor service quality is a common feature in the Nigerian Service Sector. Woldie (2003) also found a great level of dissatisfaction by many people with the quality of services provided by Nigerian hotels. This may be evidenced by the occasional complaints received from customers over the years, of poor handling of complaints, rudeness and disrespect to customers by employees, theft of items forgotten in the rooms, closing of accounts and switching from one Hotel to another by customers, routine power outage, and unnecessary delays in resolving customers complaints, call for great concern from both scholars and practitioners alike.

It is apparent that customers who receive poor treatments will perceive the hotel in a bad light and this can impact negatively on its financial performance. In the light of this, therefore, a study on the Service Quality determinants in the hotel sector and their relationship with financial performance becomes pertinent. This

presupposes that service quality invariably plays a significant role in bringing about customer loyalty and/ or satisfaction (Al-Msallam, 2015) and therefore financial performance.

The importance of financial performance to the hospitality industry and, indeed business in general cannot be overemphasized. Investigations on the link between service quality and organizational performance have been done in the US and the UK. Several authors point out that research needs to be conducted in other contexts (Erickson & Dyer, 2005; Wright, Snell & Dyer, 2005).

From all indications, it is evident that quality service delivery is very fundamental especially for the sustenance, growth and development of service sector business organisations (Rahaman et al, 2011). It works as a factor of customer satisfaction (Boshoff 2004). However, service quality has not been given the adequate importance it deserves in the hospitality industry in Nigeria. This research therefore sought to assess strategies for sustainable services quality delivery in hotels in Nigeria.

1.3 Research Objectives

The general objective of this study is to assess strategies for sustainable services quality delivery in hotels in Nigeria. The specific objectives are:

- i) To assess guest's expectation and perception level towards the hotel's service quality in different dimensions
- ii) To determine the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in the hotel.
- iii) To recommend appropriate strategies or action plans to enhance service quality delivery in Nigeria

1.4 Research Questions

The following are some of the questions which this study intends to answer:

- i) What are the guest's expectation and perception level towards the hotel's service quality in different dimensions?
- ii) What is the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in the hotel?
- iii) What are the recommendations for appropriate strategies or action plans to enhance service quality delivery in Nigeria?

1.5 Significance of Study

Most researches show that service quality has a significant relationship with financial performance (Hassan, Mamman & Farouk, 2013; Mohmood & Asetmal, 2014). So, the financial performance of hotels depends heavily on how effective and qualitative the services provided by the hotels are. The outcome of the study will expose hotels' management to the importance of using and maintaining effective and qualitative service

delivery so as to improve their financial performance.

In addition, this study would be significant as it will make employees of hospitality industry become conversant with the specific determinants of quality service delivery that will enhance financial performance. Generally, this study would be important to hotels management and policy makers by providing insight and knowledge into the best ways of enhancing service quality and financial performance as the study will expose them to areas of strength and weaknesses of the quality service dimensions. Also, hotels management will appreciate the fact that the right training of employees in terms of Service Quality dimensions will increase the commitment of hotel staff which will be reflected in the service delivery to each customer that patronize the hotel and the outcome will also be customer satisfaction as well as an improvement in the profitability and overall performance of the hotel. Hence, the outcome of the study will expose hotels management to the importance of delivering and maintaining superior service quality that will have considerable influence on financial performance of their organizations.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study examines the strategies for sustainable services quality delivery in hotels in Nigeria. Therefore five hotels in Lagos State shall be selected for the study. Lagos city is housing some of the monumental tourist attraction sites. Given its status and antecedent, Lagos is therefore an appropriate choice of location for this study.

1.7 Limitation of the Study

Financial constraints – the research was affected by the writer's limited funds to travel to different hotels in Lagos. This was a challenge as the researcher was also raising some fees for the final semester in school. The time available for the research was not adequate as there was need to concentrate on other courses by the researcher. On this note, the researcher opted to do the greater part of his research during the vacation from school.

1.8 Definition of Terms

The following terms were used during the course of the study.

Service quality: the difference between customer expectations regarding a service to be received and perceptions of service to be received and perceptions of service being received (Gronroos, 2001).

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