

Evaluation of two service quality dimensions and customer satisfaction in Ikom hotels, Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to assess hotel service quality and customer's satisfaction in Ikom town, using assurance and empathy dimensions. The specific objectives were to (i) examine the effect of assurance dimension of hotel service quality on customer satisfaction in Ikom (ii) assess the effect of empathy dimension of hotel service quality on customer satisfaction in Ikom and (iii) determine the overall effect assurance and empathy on customers' satisfaction in Ikom hotels. 296 hotel customers were randomly sampled across ten 2 star hotels in Ikom town. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The result of regression analysis shows that assurance dimension of hotel service quality has significant effect on customers' satisfaction (76.347; $p > 0.05$). Empathy was also found to have significant effect on the satisfaction of customers (549.284, $p < 0.05$). It was concluded that hotel should continue to maintain their services standard to keep their customers and woo more to patronize them.

Keywords: Service quality, customer satisfaction, hotel industry, assurance, empathy

Introduction

Service quality has emerged as a crucial element in distinguishing products and services from those offered by competitors. It serves as a gauge of how well an organization comprehends the needs of its users and meets their expectations, thereby fostering customer confidence. The level of trust a customer places in a product is what encourages them to repeatedly choose the same product, which is vital for gaining a competitive edge. Quality forms the foundation for the survival of organizations in the global economy (Rahaman, 2011, Eshetie, Seyoum, & Ali, 2016; Alemnh & Gebremichael, 2018). Delivering exceptional service is a winning strategy for any business, as it has been extensively researched and proven to contribute to increased market share, customer satisfaction, responsiveness to customer orders, customer retention and loyalty (Bello & Mejabi, 2018).

Customer satisfaction plays an important role in driving sales growth. It encompasses the feelings of fulfillment, contentment, and gratification that customers seek when purchasing a product or service. The quality of a product cannot be deemed satisfactory if it fails to meet the expectations of consumers. As highlighted by Sharma and Srivasta (2018), customer satisfaction is closely tied to the quality of services provided by a business. Winning over customers requires not only delivering the desired products but also fostering strong customer relationships, as emphasized by Fida et al. (2020). When customers are satisfied, they tend to exhibit loyalty, leading to repeat purchases and recommendations to their social circles. By consistently delivering top-notch service, organizations can establish a reliable and stable consumer base, ultimately resulting in increased sales (Elvira & Shpetim, 2016).

The service industry known as hospitality is a vital sector that heavily relies on the delivery of high-quality services to thrive. This industry encompasses various services such as lodging, restaurants, event planning, theme parks, transportation, cruise lines, and more, falling under the broader service sector umbrella (Diminyi, Agaku, Ibuo, Anyanwu & Odey 2020). Globally, the hospitality industry is a significant player, with consumer spending reaching \$4.5 trillion in 2020, covering accommodation, bars, casinos, cruise ships, travel agencies, and tour operations (Hospitality global market report 2024).

Nigeria's hospitality sector has also experienced substantial growth, contributing to the country's economic development through the establishment of hotels, fast-food chains, nightclubs, and other related businesses. Notably, accommodations, bars, and restaurants have

seen significant growth in Nigeria, alongside the emergence of travel and tour services, as well as leisure and recreational parks. The integration of new technologies has been a driving force behind the evolution of various hospitality sectors, reshaping the industry landscape in Nigeria and contributing to its overall economic growth.

In 2016, the hospitality industry in Nigeria accounted for 4.8% of the gross domestic product, with the service sector playing a crucial role in driving economic growth. By the fourth quarter of 2022, the service sector recorded a growth rate of 5.69% and contributed 56.27% to the country's GDP, indicating the sector's importance in the Nigerian economy (WTTC, 2017). The hospitality market in Nigeria is expanding rapidly, leading to diversification in services, quality, and standards. Despite this growth, there is still ample opportunity for further diversification and standardization within the industry to meet the evolving needs of consumers and ensure sustainable development (Diminyi et al., 2020). Harrington and Akehurst (2000) highlighted that the hospitality sector is currently under significant competitive pressure due to the combined impact of the global economic downturn, technological advancements, and globalization.

In Nigeria, the hospitality industry is grappling with numerous challenges amidst rising competition, making it increasingly challenging to thrive and succeed. These challenges include issues such as power supply instability, security concerns, negative international perceptions, and broader obstacles hindering the growth of the tourism sector in Nigeria (Diminyi et al., 2020). The heightened competition within the hospitality industry has necessitated a shift in service delivery practices and emphasized the importance of embracing a quality-driven approach. This shift has led to a surge in research focusing on quality management, recognizing that service quality plays a pivotal role in achieving sustainable competitive advantages. Recognizing the significance of hotel accommodation and the lack of research on service quality in hotels within Ikom Local Government Area of Cross River State, this empirical investigation aims to contribute to the existing literature in this field, particularly within the Nigerian context. The study also seeks to provide valuable insights and practical recommendations for hotel managers and other stakeholders in the accommodation industry. The specific objectives of this study are:

1. Examine the effect of assurance dimension of hotel service quality on customer satisfaction in Ikom town.
2. Ascertain the effect of empathy dimension of hotel service quality on customer satisfaction in Ikom town.

Research questions

1. What is the effect of assurance service quality on hotel customer satisfaction of hotels in Ikom town?
2. Does empathy affect customer satisfaction of hotels in Ikom town?

Hypotheses

1. Assurance has no effect on hotel customers' satisfaction in Ikom town.
2. Empathy has no significant effect on hotel customers' satisfaction in Ikom town.

Literature Review

Service quality and customer satisfaction

The quality of service provided by companies has a significant impact on various aspects such as customer satisfaction, financial performance, manufacturing costs, customer retention, customer loyalty, and the effectiveness of marketing strategies (Cherkashina 2017). It is crucial to understand that service quality is not solely evaluated based on the final outcomes but also on how it is delivered throughout the service delivery process and its overall impact on consumers' perceptions. According to Gronroos (2007), service quality is determined by the comparison consumers make between their expectations and actual experiences. Duff, Guo, and Hair (2008) emphasized that companies focusing on service quality are likely to provide services of higher quality, leading to increased customer satisfaction. Service quality is essentially the result of customers comparing their expectations of service firms with their actual perceptions of the service provided, as noted by Akroush (2008).

Numerous research studies have been conducted over the years regarding the impact of service quality on customer retention, acquisition, cost reduction, time efficiency, corporate image enhancement, positive word-of-mouth communication, profitability, and long-term competitive advantage as highlighted by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry (1991) and Bitter (1990). It is widely agreed that good service quality plays a crucial role in achieving these outcomes. Some researchers argue that service quality and customer satisfaction are interdependent, emphasizing the importance of having well-defined service quality dimensions in place to ensure customer satisfaction. This perspective underscores the significance of aligning service quality with customer expectations to enhance overall satisfaction levels.

Recent studies by Priyo, Mohamad, & Adetunji (2019) and Elvira & Sheptim (2016) have identified assurance and empathy as key determinants of efficient customer satisfaction. These dimensions are essential for evaluating the quality of service provided to customers and play a vital role in shaping their overall satisfaction levels. Additionally, research by Zameer, Tara, Kausar, & Mohsin (2015) within the banking industry highlighted the significant impact of five dimensions of service quality on customer contentment, with assurance emerging as a critical factor for customer satisfaction when compared to tangibility.

Kithome (2013) conducted a study to analyze the relationship between service provision and library user satisfaction in a university setting. The research indicated that service quality was a significant factor, contributing to 73.9% of user satisfaction in libraries. Furthermore, the study emphasized the importance of the assurance dimension in enhancing user satisfaction, highlighting its significance over the empathy dimension. In a study by Dider (2021) focusing on the impact of service quality on customer satisfaction within the hotel industry, the researcher explored the relationship between service provision and customer satisfaction in Norrköping, Sweden. The results indicated that both empathy and assurance dimensions significantly influenced customer satisfaction, underscoring their importance in the hospitality sector. Ogungbayi, Gafar, Olawale, & Agbebi (2019) investigated the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in Abeokuta metropolis, Ogun State, Nigeria. The study revealed a significant correlation between service quality and customer satisfaction, highlighting the importance of delivering high-quality services to enhance customer experience and satisfaction.

Assurance service quality dimension

The assurance dimension encompasses the knowledge and courtesy of employees, as well as their ability to instill trust and confidence in customers through competence, courtesy, credibility, and security (Rao & Sahu, 2013). An exemplary illustration of assurance practices in service delivery is ensuring that customers feel safe and secure during their stay at a hotel. This involves having trustworthy staff members who can facilitate financial transactions and

effectively communicate with guests, thereby contributing to the overall service quality (Shafiq, Shafique, Din, & Cheema 2013). Al-Tit (2015) delved into an extensive examination of customer satisfaction in various four-star hotels across Europe, revealing that customers were particularly content with hotel employees' proficiency in multiple languages, their friendliness, the comfort of rooms, and the accessibility of information about hotel services.

Conversely, Diminyi, Agaku, Paulina, Dominic & Chris (2020) evaluated customer satisfaction in selected hotels in Ogoja, Nigeria, and found that the discrepancy between hoteliers' perception of quality service and guests' expectations led to dissatisfaction among customers. Ohikhuare & Renner (2022) conducted a study on the correlation between service quality and customer satisfaction in Rivers State, concluding that only assurance and service empathy dimensions exhibited a positive and significant relationship with customer satisfaction. This underscores the importance of instilling trust and empathy in employees to enhance customer satisfaction levels in the hospitality industry.

Empathy service quality dimension

Empathy is commonly defined as demonstrating care and concern towards others. Etuk Anyadighibe, Amadi & James (2022) explain that caring involves showing interest in the customer, paying close attention to their needs, and treating them with respect. This can be viewed as providing personalized attention to customers during their interactions or visits with a specific company (Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml, 1991). Empathy also encompasses the company's ability to show care and provide individualized attention to customers, making them feel valued and special. For instance, addressing customers by their first names signifies a personal connection and genuine concern, which in turn fosters customer loyalty. Ohikhuare and Renner (2022) conducted a study on the service quality and operational performance of hotels in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Their research explored the relationship between service quality and operational performance, with service quality being measured through tangibles, assurance, responsiveness, reliability, and empathy. The findings revealed a strong correlation between service quality dimensions and customer satisfaction.

Methodology

Ikom town is one of the commercial nerve center in Cross River State located between latitude 6°05' and 6°083' N and longitude 8°037' and 8°617' E. It is a borders town between Nigeria and Cameroon in Southeastern Nigeria, characterized by multitude of international business activities, which is the reason for the large number of hotels to cater for both tourists and international business moguls. It has a tropical humid climatic condition with an annual rainfall range of 1,600 - 3,520 mm, relative humidity of 83% and average temperature of 27.1-28.6°C (Uzoho and Oti, 2005). Currently, Ikom has an estimated population of 249,300, projected at 2.7% (Annual Population Change 2006 - 2022)

The study adopted a survey design. The population of this study encompass all hotels in Ikom town. However, since it is difficult to determine the exact number of hotel patrons at the time of this study, an estimated population of 1200 customers was used for the study. Yamane's formula of 1967 was used to determine the sample size for the study. Thus:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

where:

n = sample size

N = population size

$e =$ error margin

$1 =$ constant

Therefore,

$$n = \frac{1200}{1+1200(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{1200}{1+1200(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{1200}{1+3} = \frac{1200}{4} = 300$$

Purposive sampling and simple random sampling techniques was used to select hotels and participants for the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to select ten registered hotels within Ikom town, while simple random sampling method was used to select three hundred customers across the hotels. The proportion of sample customers is shown in table 1.

Table 1: Sample hotels and sample size for hotel customers

S/N	Name of hotels	Sample customers per hotel	Percentage of customers per ward
1	Oak hotel	37	12.3%
2	Portland	31	10.3%
3	Swiss inter.	23	7.7%
4	Goshen	32	10.7%
5	Randolf	21	7%
6	TOA hub	26	8.7%
7	Sweet spirit	33	11%
8	De elite	25	8.3%
9	Orian	32	10.7%
10	Novotel	40	13.3%
		300	100%

Source: Researchers' fieldwork (2024)

The main instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire which was divided into two sections A and B. Section A was design to elicit information on respondents' demographic characteristics, while section two collected information on respondents' satisfaction of the effect of two service quality dimensions (assurance and empathy). Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze data. Descriptive statistics such as frequency tables, simple percentage and charts were used to analyze information on respondents' biodata. On the other hand, simple linear regression was used to analyze respondents' information regarding the effect of assurance and empathy dimensions of service quality on their satisfaction.

The simple linear regression model is given by: $y = a + bx + e$

Where:

y = is the dependent variable

x = is the independent variable

a = is a parameter indicating intercept with the y axis

b = is the parameter indicating the slope of the regression line

e = a stochastic disturbance term (error term)

Result

Demographic characteristics of respondents

Figure 1 below shows that, the total number of sample size was 296 of which 158 representing 53.3 per cent were male and the remaining 138 representing 46.6 per cent were female respondents. Therefore, the majority of the respondents were male guests.

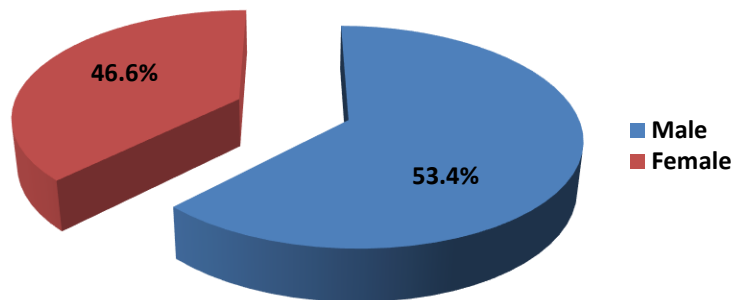


FIG. 1: Percentage of male and female respondents

Figure 2 represents respondents' age. The figure shows that 118 respondents representing 39.9 per cent were in the age group of 18 – 30 years, 98 respondents representing 33.1 per cent were between the ages of 31 and 40 years and 68 respondents representing 22.9 per cent were in the age group of 41 – 60 years. Only 12 respondents accounting for 4.1 per cent were between the age of 61 and above. This analysis shows that out of 296 respondents, 284 falls under the age group of between 18 and 60 years.

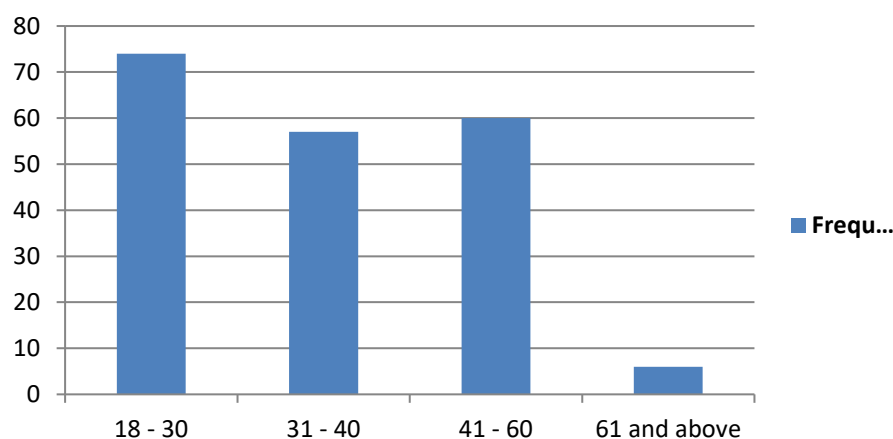


FIG. 2: Age distribution of respondents

From figure 3 below, males and females that represent the single category of the respondents were a total of 160 (54.1%), the married respondents were 94(31.8%) of the sample. Divorced among the respondents constitute 30(10.1%), widows fell within 6(2.1%), while widower were 6(2.1%) of the sample.

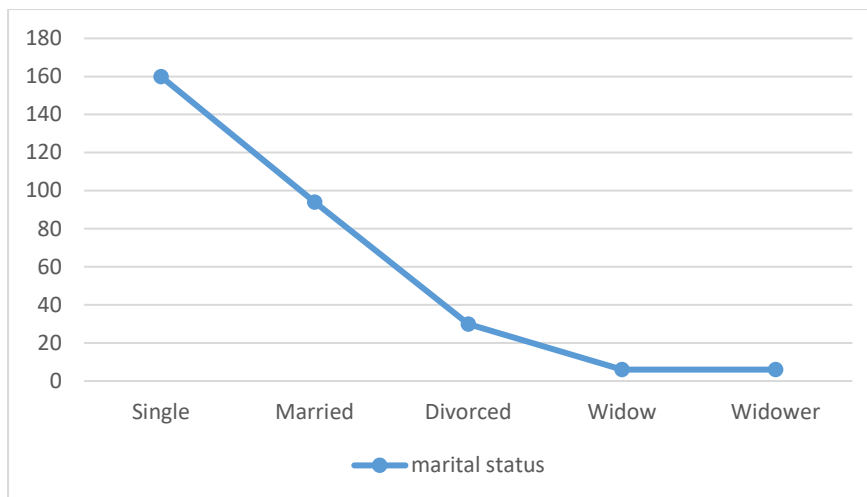


FIG. 3: Marital status of respondents

Figure 4 shows the occupation of respondents. From the figure, 10.8 per cent respondents were farmers, 13.2 per cent were students, 56.4 per cent were business owners, 13.2 per cent were civil servants, while only 6.4 per cent were applicants.

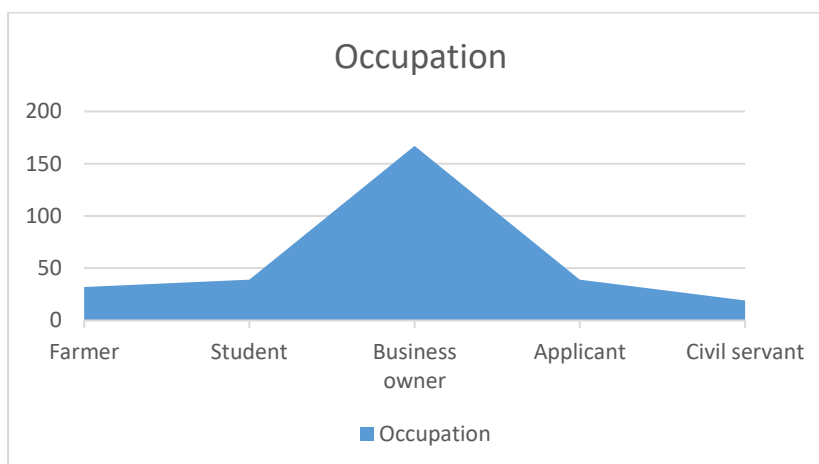


FIG. 4: Occupation of respondents

The result of the educational qualification of respondents is represented in the figure 5 below. It can be seen that 108 respondents representing 36.5% are B.Sc. holders, 88 respondents representing 29.7% are NCE holders, 46 respondents representing 15.5% are Master degree holders, 32 representing 10.8% are SSCE holders, 12 respondents representing 4.1% hold Ph.D and only 10 respondents representing 3.4 % are holders of First School Leaving Certificate. This result shows that majority of the respondents hold Bachelor degree, Nigeria Certificate in Education and Master's Degree.

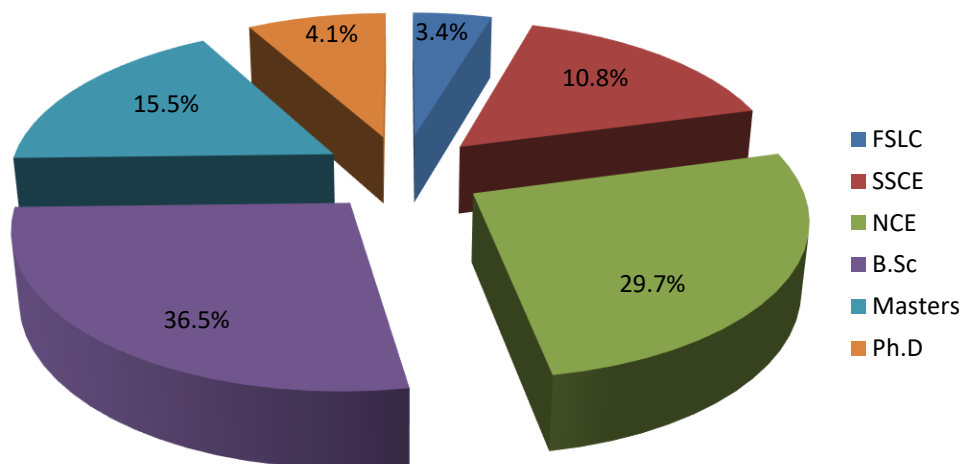


FIG 5: Percentage of respondents' educational qualification

Effect of assurance on customer satisfaction.

Table 1 displays the data regarding the respondents' perspectives on the security and safety of customers. The findings indicate that 5.1 percent of the respondents strongly disagree, 6.1 percent disagree, and 15.2 percent remain neutral in their opinion. Additionally, the table reveals that 39.9 percent strongly agree, while 33.8 percent agree with the given opinion. In terms of the hotel's provision of solutions to customers' problems, 5.1 percent strongly disagree, 8.4 percent disagree, and 17.9 percent remain neutral. Furthermore, 34.8 percent strongly agree, while 33.8 percent agree. The table further uncovers that 13.1 percent strongly disagree with the encouraging attitude of hotel staff towards customers, 10.1 percent disagree, and 13.9 percent remain neutral. Moreover, 35.1 percent strongly agree, while 27.7 percent assert that they agree. Regarding the staff's knowledge of hotel services, 1.4 percent strongly disagree, 4.4 percent disagree, and 15.5 percent remain neutral. The table further reveals that 48.0 percent strongly agree, while 37.8 percent agree. Lastly, concerning the attribute of the hotel running 24-hour lighting, 3.0 percent strongly disagree, 9.1 percent disagree, and 21.3 percent remain neutral. Furthermore, the table discloses that 28.7 percent strongly agree, while 16.8 percent agree.

Table 1: Hotel service assurance and customer satisfaction

Item	Frequencies and percentages of responses					Total
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
1 Security and safety of customers	118(39.9)	100(33.8)	45(15.2)	18(6.1)	15(5.1)	296
2 Solutions to customers' problems	103(34.8)	100(33.8)	53(17.9)	25(8.4)	15(5.1)	296
3 Encouraging attitude to customers	104(35.1)	82(27.7)	41(13.9)	30(10.1)	39(13.1)	296
4 Staff knowledge of hotel services	142(48.0)	91(30.7)	46(15.5)	13(4.4)	4(1.4)	296
5 The hotel run 24hours lighting	85(28.7)	112(37.8)	63(21.3)	27(9.1)	9(3.0)	296
Total	552(37.3)	485(32.8)	248(16.8)	113(7.6)	82(5.5)	1480

Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2024

Test of hypothesis 1

The regression analysis conducted in tables 2, 3, and 4 examines the impact of the service quality dimension of assurance on customers' satisfaction. In table 2, the model summary indicates a 45.4 percent relationship between the variables, as shown in the R column.

The R² value of 0.206 in table 3 suggests that 20.6 percent of hotel performance in Ikom is influenced by the service quality dimension of assurance when controlling for other variables.

The F-test in table 3 reveals that the overall prediction of the independent variable on the dependent variable is statistically insignificant. However, the regression model in table 2 provides evidence that the service quality dimension of assurance significantly impacts customers' satisfaction in hotels in Ikom town. Table 4, the coefficients table, further supports this finding by showing that assurance positively influences customers' satisfaction with a p-value less than 0.05 and positive t-test values.

The standardized beta coefficient of 0.454 in table 4 indicates that assurance makes a positive contribution to the model. Overall, the results of the regression analysis lead to the rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis regarding the influence of assurance on customers' satisfaction.

Table 2: Model Summary for assurance

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.454 ^a	.206	.203	1.218

a. Predictors: (Constant), Assurance

Table 3: ANOVA for assurance

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	113.235	1	113.235	76.347	.000 ^b
	Residual	436.049	294	1.483		
	Total	549.284	295			

a. Dependent Variable: Satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), Assurance

Table 4: assurance Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.567	.368		1.542	.124
	Assurance	.162	.019	.454	8.738	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Satisfaction

Effect of empathy on customer satisfaction.

To determine the satisfaction of customers on the empathy dimension of hotel service quality in Ikom town. Table 5 reveals that 6.4 per cent of the respondents strongly disagree that the staff understands customers' needs, 12.5 per cent disagree and 14.5 per cent were neutral. More so, the Table reveals that 33.1 per cent strongly agree while 33.4 per cent agree to the opinion. The respondents further gave their opinion on the attribute that the hotel staff give customers individual attention, 9.8 per cent strongly disagree, 11.1 per cent disagree while 10.5 per cent alluded neutral on their opinion. However, 35.8 per cent strongly agree while 32.8 agree. Furthermore, the Table reveals that only 3.7 per cent strongly disagree that the hotel has customers at heart, 4.4 per cent disagree while 9.1 only were neutral on the opinion. Also, the Table further revealed 48.0 per cent strongly agree while 34.8 per cent agree. On the attribute that staff are always courteous to guest, 4.4 per cent strongly disagree, 6.1 per cent disagree and 14.5 per cent were neutral. However, 56.4 per cent strongly agree while 18.6 per cent agree. More so, the Table further reveals respondents' opinion that staff care genuinely for customers,

11.5 per cent strongly disagree while 13.9 per cent disagree and 17.9 of the respondents were neutral on their opinion. Also, 26.4 percent strongly agree and 30.4 per cent agree.

Table 5: Hotel service Empathy and customer satisfaction

Item	Frequencies and percentages of responses					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
1 Staff understands customers' needs	98(33.1)	99(33.4)	43(14.5)	37(12.5)	19(6.4)	296
2 Staff give customers individual attention	106(35.8)	97(32.8)	31(10.5)	33(11.1)	29(9.8)	296
3 The hotel has customers at heart	142(48.0)	103(34.8)	27(9.1)	13(4.4)	11(3.7)	296
4 Staff are always courteous to guests	167(56.4)	55(18.6)	43(14.5)	18(6.1)	13(4.4)	296
5 Staff care genuinely for customers	78(26.4)	90(30.4)	53(17.9)	41(13.9)	34(11.5)	296
Total	591(40)	444(30)	197(13.3)	142(9.6)	106(7.1)	1480

Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2024

Test of hypothesis 2

The regression tables 6, 7 and 8 show service quality dimension of empathy being appraised for its ability to influence customers' satisfaction. Table 6, which is the model summary reveals that the relationship between both variables is 47.8 percent (as seen in the *R* column). The R^2 value (0.229) signifies that up to 22.9 percent of performance of hotels in Ikom town is caused by the service quality dimension of empathy when other variables are held constant. This relationship is strong and statistically significant. This indicates that the model has a good fit in estimating the population mean.

The F-test (549.284, $p < 0.05$) of the relationship in Table 7 indicates that the overall prediction of the independent variable to the dependent variable is statistically significant. Therefore, the regression model provides sufficient evidence to conclude that service quality dimension of empathy significantly influences customers' satisfaction of hotels in Ikom

Table 8 is the coefficients table, which provides the necessary information on the capability of empathy to predict customer's satisfaction of hotel services. From the table above, it can be seen that, empathy significantly influence customer's satisfaction of hotel services positively as its *p* value is less than 0.05 with positive *t*-test values. Additionally, the standardized beta coefficient column shows that with a beta coefficient of 0.478 (47.8 percent), empathy makes the positive contribution to the model. The result of the regression requires that we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative.

Table 6: Model Summary for empathy

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.478 ^a	.229	.226	1.200

a. Predictors: (Constant), Empathy

Table 7: ANOVA empathy

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	125.610	1	125.610	87.165	.000 ^b
Residual	423.674	294	1.441		
Total	549.284	295			

a. Dependent Variable: Satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), Empathy

Table 8: empathy Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	.613	.340		1.801	.073
Empathy	.161	.017	.478	9.336	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Satisfaction

Discussion

This research indicates that the assurance aspect of hotel service quality has a significant impact on customer satisfaction. To our knowledge, this is the first study to observe that hotel customers in Ikom express satisfaction with the assurances provided by hotel staff. The assurance dimension encompasses the knowledge and courtesy of employees, as well as their ability to instill trust and confidence, which includes factors such as competence, courtesy, credibility, and security (Rao & Sahu, 2013). The regression analysis for the first hypothesis reveals that a primary reason for hotel patronage in Ikom is the assurance customers receive, with a significant value of 76.347 ($p > 0.05$). This finding suggests a strong relationship between the assurance dimension of service quality and customer satisfaction. Furthermore, it can be inferred that the positive outcomes observed may be attributed to hotel staff delivering exceptional services, such as ensuring customer security and safety, addressing customer issues effectively, maintaining a positive attitude, demonstrating job knowledge, and providing 24-hour power supply. Additionally, this study's findings align with those of Meshack & Prusty (2021), who reported a significant mean value of 4.62, indicating a strong influence of assurance on customer satisfaction. The percentage values from the analysis also explained the level of service received at the hotels, with most participants giving strongly agree responses, meaning that majority of customers were satisfied with the assurances provided by the hotels. Conversely, this finding contrasts with Kasim's (2021) research, which identified a negative relationship between assurance and customer satisfaction.

The study also indicates a positive correlation between empathy attribute of service quality and customer satisfaction in Ikom hotels. This implies that the alternative hypothesis is supported, while the null hypothesis is rejected. As noted by Frazer (2000), demonstrating care involves showing genuine interest in customers by paying close attention to their needs and respecting them. This was evidenced by the regression analysis, which yielded a significant F value of (549.284, $p < 0.05$). The finding correlates well with the report of Ali et al., (2021), Afthornorhan (2019) where they reported a positive relationship between empathy and customer satisfaction. The results may reflect the premise that hotel staff are attuned to customer needs, provide personalized attention, prioritize customer welfare, maintain courteous interactions with guests, and genuinely care for their clientele.

Empathy encompasses the ways in which a company demonstrates care and provides personalized attention to its customers, ensuring they feel valued and unique. For instance, using customers' first names signifies a deep understanding and personal connection, fostering loyalty as they feel welcomed and appreciated (Micah, 2015). This conclusion aligns with the research conducted by Iheanacho & Ndu (2019), which examined the relationship between service quality and operational performance in hotels located in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Their study focused on the empathy dimension of service quality and found a strong correlation between service quality and customer satisfaction. This is further supported by Ali et al. (2021), who highlighted the significant impact of empathy on hotel guest satisfaction. However, this perspective is challenged by the findings of Meshack & Prusty (2021), which indicated a negative correlation between empathy and customer satisfaction.

Conclusion

This study investigated the effect of two service quality dimension on customer satisfaction using selected hotels in Ikom town. The findings revealed that assurance and empathy service quality dimensions significantly influence customer satisfaction in Ikom hotels. The regression analysis of individual dimensions revealed that assurance and empathy have significant effect on customer satisfaction in their respective ways ($\beta=0.454$, $p<0.05$; $\beta=0.478$, $p<0.05$). This is in affirmation with most previous studies on the subject matter, which emphasize that customers can only be satisfied when hotel services are holistically performed together. Based on the findings of the study, the authors recommend that hotels in Ikom should maintain their current service standard to woo more customers, while maintaining the current ones. Considering the significance of assurance and empathy on customer satisfaction and positive testimonials, more emphasis on service standard will enhance repeat patronage.

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