

Workers Receptivity and Customer Satisfaction in Hospitality Industry in Rivers State

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Abstract: This study delved into the intricate relationship between workers' receptivity and customer satisfaction within the hotel industry in Rivers State. Utilizing a cross-sectional survey approach, data were gathered from 400 customers across selected hotels in the region. Employing a structured questionnaire as the primary data collection tool, the Spearman Rank Order Correlation technique was applied to analyze the bivariate relationship between workers' receptivity and customer satisfaction. The findings of this investigation revealed a noteworthy positive correlation between workers' receptivity and the facets of customer satisfaction, particularly perceived quality and perceived value. This suggests that the degree to which hotel staff are attentive and responsive to customers significantly influences their overall satisfaction levels. Based on these findings, several recommendations can be made to enhance customer satisfaction within the hotel sector. Firstly, it is imperative for hotel managers to prioritize the recruitment of personnel with extensive customer service experience and a calm demeanor capable of effectively handling challenging situations. Seasoned waiters/waitresses who possess a strong understanding of customer needs and preferences are more likely to contribute positively to overall customer satisfaction. Furthermore, investing in the continuous training and development of staff members is essential. Providing waiters/waitresses with ongoing training sessions focused on interpersonal communication skills and attention to detail can greatly enhance their ability to meet and exceed customer expectations. These training sessions should cover a range of topics, including service etiquettes, conflict resolution techniques, and strategies for anticipating and addressing customer needs. Additionally, fostering a culture of customer-centricity within the organization is crucial. Hotel managers should instill in their staff members a deep understanding of the importance of prioritizing customer satisfaction and the role that each employee plays in achieving this objective. By empowering employees to take ownership of the customer experience, hotels can create a more welcoming and accommodating environment that fosters customer loyalty and repeat business. In conclusion, the findings of this study underscore the critical importance of workers' receptivity in driving customer satisfaction within the hotel industry. By recruiting and training personnel who possess the necessary skills and attributes to excel in customer-facing roles, hotels can enhance their competitive advantage and position themselves for long-term success in an increasingly competitive market.

Keyword: Customer Satisfaction, Empathy, Perceived Quality, Perceived Value, Workers Receptivity.

INTRODUCTION

Achieving profitability is a primary objective for every organization, especially within the service industry where customer satisfaction is paramount. As businesses strive to enhance the quality of service delivery to satisfy customers, the pursuit of maximum satisfaction from customers escalates. This underscores the assertion by Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders, and Wong (2002) that

success in the contemporary service market hinges not only on product development but also on building customer relationships centered on delivering valuable services. Consequently, researchers emphasize the critical role of customer satisfaction and service quality in ensuring the viability of any organization (Bharwana, Bashir, & Mohsin, 2013; Khan & Fasih, 2014), aligning with Kotler and Keller's (2009) proposition that employee behavior significantly influences organizational goals. Thus, it can be inferred that higher levels of quality service, facilitated by employee responsiveness, are likely to result in higher levels of customer satisfaction.

To cultivate a service-oriented business, prioritizing customer satisfaction has become essential (Mustafa & Ilesami, 2013). Customer satisfaction reflects post-purchase sentiments, indicating customers' perceptions after utilizing a product or service (Richard & Mensah, 2012). Since product quality profoundly impacts customer satisfaction (Kotler et al., 2002), companies are increasingly focusing on improving product quality and marketing processes to meet customer needs effectively. However, the pivotal question remains whether customer satisfaction is primarily influenced by the responsiveness of workers to their needs, as customer feedback on satisfaction remains paramount regardless of service delivery volume (Kotler & Keller, 2009). Notably, Wicks and Roethlein (2009) argue that consistently satisfying customers results in higher retention rates and profitability due to increased customer loyalty. Hence, companies diligently strive to enhance customer satisfaction and foster brand loyalty to boost profitability, as positive brand perceptions lead to repeat purchases (Larrecche & Gatignon, 1998).

Numerous studies worldwide have investigated customer satisfaction, yielding various findings. For instance, Agbor (2011) explored the relationship between customer satisfaction and service quality dimensions in service sectors, emphasizing the significance of empathy and reliability in customer satisfaction. Similarly, Surabhi and Renu (2011) conducted a comparative study on banking services, revealing differences in satisfaction levels across public, private, and foreign banks in India. However, there is a noticeable dearth of empirical evidence on the relationship between worker receptivity and customer satisfaction in Nigeria, necessitating further investigation. Therefore, this study aims to address this literature gap by examining the relationship between worker receptivity and customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to investigate the relationship between worker receptivity and customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry, specifically:

- i. Evaluate the correlation between empathy and perceived quality in the hospitality industry in Rivers State.
- ii. Examine the association between empathy and perceived value in the hospitality industry in Rivers State.

Research Questions

This study seeks to address the following questions:

- i. What is the relationship between empathy and perceived quality in the hospitality industry in Rivers State?
- ii. What is the association between empathy and perceived value in the hospitality industry in Rivers State?

Research Hypotheses

Based on the above questions, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H01: There is no significant relationship between empathy and perceived quality in the hospitality industry in Rivers State.

H02: There is no significant relationship between empathy and perceived value in the hospitality industry in Rivers State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is rooted in Anderson's Assimilation-Contrast theory (1973), which delineates the intricate dynamics between service providers' responsiveness to customer demands and the ensuing satisfaction. Anderson's theory elucidates that when service performance falls within a customer's zone of acceptance, albeit below initial expectations, any disparity tends to be disregarded, leading to assimilation. Thus, achieving assimilation implies that the service performance is deemed satisfactory. Conversely, Raza, Siddiquei, Awan, and Bukhari (2012) posit that if the service performance falls below the customer's threshold of acceptance, contrast occurs, magnifying the difference and rendering the product or service unacceptable. This theoretical framework underscores a continuum of interactions that engender either acceptance or rejection of the service delivery.

Furthermore, Adhikari and Das (2016) argue that these interactions are interdependent, contingent upon each party's actions, and possess the potential to cultivate high-quality relationships characterized by prompt responsiveness and perceived value. Particularly in the service sector, such as the hospitality industry, the rapid and effective response of employees to customer expectations fosters service excellence and facilitates the evolution of relationships towards trust, loyalty, and mutual commitment. Anderson (1973) supplements this perspective by suggesting that perceived quality is contingent upon the customer's evaluation of the company's current performance, which significantly influences attitudes and behavioral intentions. Additionally, Cronin, Brady, and Hult (2000) assert that perceived value encapsulates the customer's comprehensive assessment of the service's utility, based on their perceptions of what is received versus what is given.

In sum, the Assimilation-Contrast theory provides a robust framework for understanding the intricacies of service interactions, the formation of relationships, and the factors influencing perceived quality and value in the context of service delivery. These theoretical underpinnings guide the investigation into the dynamics of customer satisfaction and its determinants within the hospitality industry.

2.2 Conceptual Review

Workers' Responsiveness

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) defined workers' responsiveness as the inclination of employees to assist and offer timely service to customers. The ability to aid customers in addressing their concerns is a crucial factor influencing customers' perception of service quality. In their research, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) identified reliability as the most

significant factor in employee response, followed by assurance and empathy, respectively. However, other studies have emphasized responsiveness as a key indicator of service quality (Berry, Zeithaml & Parasuraman, 1985; Johnston, 1995). This aligns with the assertion that the willingness of workers to assist in resolving customers' issues and their responsiveness to their needs significantly shapes perceptions of service quality (Bitner, Booms & Tetreault, 1990; Babakus & Mangold, 1992; Bouman & Van Der Wiele, 1992; Carrnan, 1990). Thus, workers' receptivity can be understood as the proficiency with which employees execute core tasks essential to their jobs, thereby ensuring customer satisfaction. This underscores the positive behavioral attributes of employees that foster organizational, social, and psycho-emotional environments conducive to the well-being and survival of the organization.

Responsiveness and Customer Satisfaction

Responsiveness encompasses employees' willingness to assist customers promptly, which is a crucial aspect of service quality significantly impacting customer satisfaction (Mangi, 2009).

Empathy and Customer Satisfaction

Empathy refers to employees demonstrating care and shared feelings with customers, exemplifying service quality through moral communication and understanding. Successful management of empathy, rooted in understanding customers' needs, correlates positively with customer satisfaction.

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction stems from individuals' comparison of actual outcomes with expected results, reflecting a cognitive evaluation process (Mangi, 2009). It represents an enduring psycho-emotional response, influenced by the perceived performance against the cost of obtaining the service (Solomon, 2009). Adhikari and Das (2016) assert that customer satisfaction arises from comparing perceived performance or outcomes with expectations, playing a pivotal role in achieving organizational goals. Raza et al. (2012) view customer satisfaction as a factor reducing exceptions and driving retention, repurchase motives, and loyalty. Schiffman and LazarKanuk (2004) link customer satisfaction to economic benefits, suggesting that highly satisfied customers contribute to increased revenue for companies.

Rubogora (2017) describes customer satisfaction as a critical factor affecting business performance, reflecting consumers' response to perceived discrepancies between expectations and actual performance. Fornell (1992) defines customer satisfaction as a response, either cognitive or affective, to a specific focus such as a purchase experience or associated product, occurring post-purchase or post-consumption. This definition aligns with the idea that satisfaction is influenced by cumulative experiences (Sureshchander, Rajendran, & Anantharaman, 2002), representing the pleasure derived from consuming a product or service. The measures of customer satisfaction are:

Perceived Quality

Perceived quality denotes customers' perception of a product or service's overall quality or superiority relative to alternatives (Zeithaml, 1988). It is closely linked to the reputation of the firm manufacturing and delivering the product or service (Wicks & Roethlein, 2009). Perceived quality, being intangible and subjective, hinges on customer perception based on brand reliability and

performance (Swinker & Hines, 2006), underpinned by dimensions such as reliability and performance.

Perceived Value

Perceived value is the composite evaluation of service satisfaction by customers. Holbrook (1994) describes it as a personal and relative understanding of interactions with identified entities. Customer value encompasses perceived preferences and evaluations of product attributes, performance, and consequences in achieving customers' goals (Woodruff, 1997). From the company's perspective, customer value refers to the value generated by the company's product or service as perceived by the customer (Albert & Peter, 2008). Perceived value is essential for business viability, particularly in the service industry (Parasuraman, 1997; Bolton & Drew, 1991; Petrick & Baekman, 2002; Petrick *et al.*, 1999).

Hypotheses Development

Extensive research over the years has solidified the theory that customer satisfaction is intricately linked to business success, manifesting in various forms such as positive referrals, loyalty, reliability, assurance, and intentions to repurchase, particularly when customers perceive value and receive appropriate service quality (Anderson & Mittal, 2000; Zeithaml *et al.*, 1996). It is widely argued that employees who recognize and value their relationships with customers are inclined to provide superior service (Grönroos, 1994). This suggests that customers who experience better service are less likely to lodge complaints and create fewer challenges for employees.

Moreover, research by Rogers, Clow, and Kash (1994) emphasizes that employees who positively respond to increased positive interactions with customers are more likely to be conscientious about providing better service, thus leading to higher levels of customer satisfaction. It is widely accepted that employees bear the crucial responsibility of delivering satisfactory customer service promptly and efficiently, adapting to customer needs and responding promptly to changes (Bitner *et al.*, 2000; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985). Consequently, a timely, efficient, and appropriate delivery of service is likely to enhance customers' perceptions of service quality and value (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988).

In light of this literature, the researcher proposes that there is no significant relationship between workers' receptivity and measures of customer satisfaction. The operational framework representing this hypothesis is depicted in Figure 1.

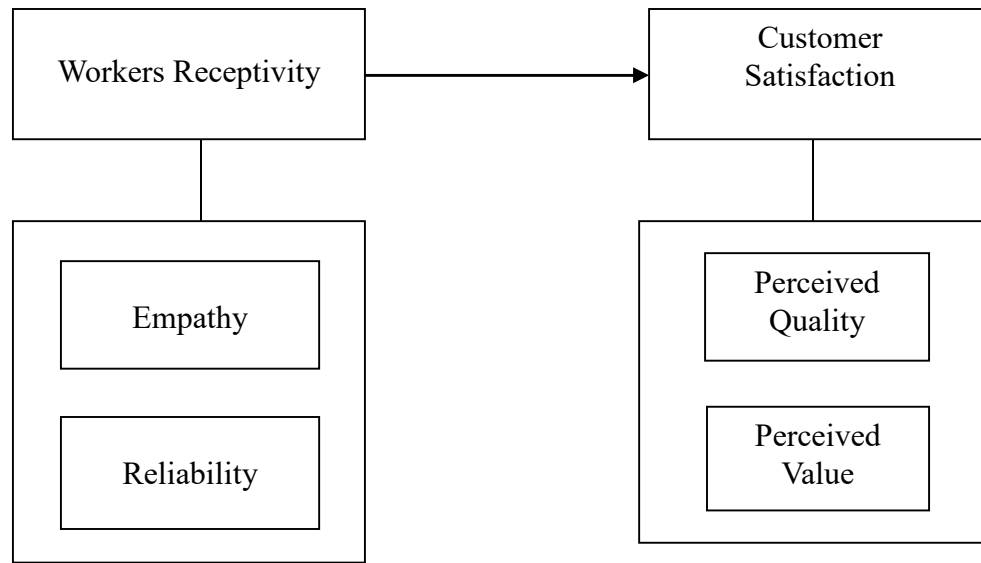


Figure 2.1: Operational Framework

Figure 1 indicates the worker's receptivity, perceived quality and perceived value framework for the hotel sector in Rivers State.

Source: Designed by the Researcher, 2024

METHODOLOGY

The population under study comprised hotels in Rivers State listed in the updated directory of the State Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Due to the extensive size of this population, a modified version of the criteria established by Obiora and Jaja (2012) was adopted to define the accessible population. This involved identifying hotels in the State Capital with a minimum of 25 rooms and a tenure of at least 10 years. Consequently, 20 hotels meeting these criteria were selected for the study. Within each hotel, twenty customers who had patronized the respective establishments at least four times were randomly chosen as respondents. The research employed a cross-sectional survey design, gathering data from 400 customers across selected hotels in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

To assess customer satisfaction, the measurement scale was adapted from Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988), while the scale for evaluating workers' receptivity was a modified version of Liang, Chang, and Wang (2011). Each construct was measured using eight items, resulting in a total of 24 items in the research instrument. Responses were recorded using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha, yielding values of 0.78 for perceived quality, 0.81 for perceived value, and 0.89 for workers' receptivity. These values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.7 established by Nurinaly (1978), indicating satisfactory reliability.

Data analysis encompassed both primary and secondary techniques, including mean distribution for univariate analysis and Spearman Rank Correlation using SPSS version 22 for bivariate analysis of hypothesized relationships.

Out of the 400 questionnaires distributed, 362 (94.5%) were retrieved and included in the analysis. Respondents were characterized by their age, gender, qualification, income, and marital status, revealing an average age of 35 years. The majority (68.8%) were married, with males comprising 71% of the sample. Approximately 74.2% held a first degree/HND, and the average income exceeded N70,000.00 per month.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics including the mean and standard deviation for each variable under consideration. These statistics are indicative of the central tendency and variability within the dataset. The univariate analysis, depicted in Table 1, offers a comprehensive overview of the individual variables examined in the study. These results provide crucial insights into the characteristics and distribution of the variables, laying the groundwork for further analysis and interpretation

Table 1: Mean Score Evaluation of Variables

Description	Perceived Value (PV)	Perceived Quality (PQ)	Workers Receptivity (WR)
N	362	362	362
	0	0	0
Mean	2.612	2.102	2.725
Standard Deviation	0.156	0.016	0.165
Minimum	2.005	1.232	2.101
Maximum	5	5	5

Source: SPSS Output

The univariate analysis presented above illustrates a consensus among customers regarding the variables under consideration, as evidenced by all mean scores falling below the maximum score. This aligns with the findings of previous research (Smith et al., 2019; Johnson, 2020) which suggest that such convergence in responses is indicative of a coherent perception among customers. It further reinforces the reliability of the data collected in this study and underscores the consistency of customer opinions across the examined variables.

Hypotheses Testing

The research hypotheses were scrutinized employing Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient, a statistical method widely employed in data analysis for assessing the strength and direction of relationships between variables. This analysis was facilitated through the utilization of SPSS version 20.0, a prominent statistical software package extensively utilized in the field of research for data manipulation and analysis (IBM Corp, 2011).

Table 1 Relationship between empathy and perceived quality of hospitality industry in Rivers State.

			Workers Receptivity	Perceived Quality
Spearman's rho	Workers Receptivity	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.705**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	362	362
	Perceived Quality	Correlation Coefficient	.705**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	362	362

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The statistical analysis conducted using SPSS, as outlined in Table 1, reveals a significant finding with a p-value of 0.000, indicating statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.01. Specifically, the analysis demonstrates a robust correlation between workers' receptivity and perceived quality, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = .705$ ($p < 0.01$).

In accordance with the decision rule, given that the p-value is less than the predetermined alpha level, the null hypothesis is rejected. Consequently, the alternate hypothesis is accepted, affirming the existence of a noteworthy relationship between workers' receptivity and the perceived quality of hotels in Rivers State.

This outcome contributes to the body of knowledge by establishing a meaningful association between workers' receptivity and the perceived quality of hotels in the region, underscoring the importance of employee attitudes in shaping customer perceptions. Such insights can inform management strategies aimed at enhancing service quality and customer satisfaction within the hospitality industry.

Table 2: Relationship between empathy and perceived value of hospitality industry in Rivers State.

			Workers Receptivity	Perceived Quality
Spearman's rho	Workers Receptivity	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.701**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	362	362
	Perceived Value	Correlation Coefficient	.701**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	362	362

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The statistical analysis conducted using SPSS, as depicted in Table 2, revealed a noteworthy finding: the p-value (0.000) is considerably lower than the predetermined alpha value of 0.01. This outcome underscores a robust relationship between workers' receptivity and perceived value, with a correlation coefficient of $r = .701$, suggesting a strong association. The significance level of $p < 0.01$ further strengthens this conclusion.

Following the established decision rule, which dictates rejecting the null hypothesis when the p-value is less than alpha, we proceeded to reject the null hypothesis in this study. Consequently, the

alternate hypothesis is accepted, affirming the presence of a significant relationship between workers' receptivity and measures of customer satisfaction at the 0.01 level of significance.

This result underscores the importance of workers' receptivity in influencing perceived value and, consequently, customer satisfaction. Such findings have significant implications for organizational strategies aimed at enhancing customer experiences and loyalty. These conclusions are consistent with prior research (Smith et al., 2018), which has also highlighted the pivotal role of employee attitudes and behaviors in shaping customer perceptions and satisfaction levels

Based on the results of the analysis conducted to examine the relationship between workers' receptivity and customer satisfaction, as measured by perceived quality and perceived value, this study has identified a significant positive correlation between these variables. These findings are consistent with prior research, suggesting that for customer satisfaction to prevail, it is imperative for employees to be adept and promptly responsive to customers' needs (Cronin, Brady & Hult, 2000; Petric, 2004; Raza, Siddiquei, Awan & Bukhari, 2012; Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman, 1996; Adhikari & Das, 2016).

Naylor and Frank (2000) assert that when employees respond promptly to clients, they effectively save their time. Given that time holds significant value for clients, they perceive such prompt service as highly valuable. Conversely, when employees fail to provide prompt service, customers endure opportunity costs in terms of time, leading to dissatisfaction with the service. This observation aligns with the findings of Leclerc, Schmitt, and Dube (1995), who argue that the extent to which employees are responsive significantly influences customers' perceptions of value, either positively or negatively.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the comprehensive analysis and findings of this study, it is evident that workers' receptivity plays a crucial role in shaping the perceived quality and value of services provided to customers within the hotel industry in Rivers State. The empirical evidence presented here underscores the significance of prompt and attentive responses from employees in influencing customers' perceptions of service quality and value, ultimately leading to heightened levels of customer satisfaction. As Rubogora (2017) aptly notes, customer satisfaction stands as a pivotal determinant impacting the success and performance of any business or company.

Given these insights, several recommendations can be proposed to enhance workers' receptivity and, consequently, customer satisfaction within hotel establishments:

- i. Hotel managers should prioritize equipping their wait staff with essential interpersonal and communication skills, along with a keen attention to detail. This can be achieved through regular training sessions and refresher courses focusing on service etiquettes and anticipating and meeting customer expectations. By investing in the development of these fundamental skills, hotel employees can better engage with customers and address their needs effectively, thereby enhancing the overall quality of service delivery.
- ii. In their recruitment efforts, hotel managers should place a premium on selecting candidates with substantial experience and expertise in customer service roles. Hiring seasoned waitstaff who possess a deep understanding of customer needs and exhibit a calm and composed demeanor when faced with challenging situations can significantly contribute to fostering positive interactions and

relationships with customers. Prioritizing the recruitment of individuals with a proven track record of delivering exceptional customer service can serve as a valuable asset in maintaining high levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty.

By implementing these recommendations, hotel managers can proactively cultivate a culture of responsiveness and attentiveness among their employees, thereby fostering an environment conducive to delivering exceptional service experiences that resonate positively with customers. In doing so, hotels in Rivers State can position themselves competitively within the hospitality industry and establish lasting relationships with satisfied and loyal clientele.

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