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# **The Effect of Service Quality on Customers' Loyalty to Selected Hotels in Enugu Metropolis, Enugu, Nigeria.**

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**ABSTRACT:**

The hotel industry in Enugu Metropolis, Nigeria, faces a significant challenge in providing exceptional service to meet and exceed customer expectations, which is crucial for customer loyalty. This study investigates the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty in selected hotels in Enugu Metropolis. A survey research design was employed, and a questionnaire was used to collect data from a sample size of 250 respondents. The study examines the effect of service quality dimensions (tangibility, responsiveness, reliability, assurance, and empathy) on customer loyalty. The results, analyzed using IBM SPSS, reveal a significant and positive relationship between service quality and customer loyalty. The findings suggest that service quality has a profound impact on customer loyalty in Enugu Metropolis hotels. Improving tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy can enhance customer loyalty. Hotel proprietors and management should prioritize service quality dimensions to gain a competitive edge, foster customer engagement, and improve service quality, leading to repeat patronage, customer loyalty, and ultimately, profitability and long-term relationships with guests.

**Key Words:** Service quality, Customers Loyalty, Hotels, Enugu Metropolis.

**INTRODUCTION.**

The history of hotel business in Enugu dated back to the early 1950s. The earlier hotels in Enugu were Dayspring hotel established at about 1955 and thereafter, the Atlantic hotel, Night life hotel, Olympic hotel and the Presidential hotel, Pascan Jakes Hotels at about April 30, 1979, located at Bisala Road, Independence Layout and Zodiac Hotel in Rangers Avenue, Independence Layout (Amalu and Ajake, 2015; Obeke and Abugu, 2021). Hotels business in Enugu is a striving industry. Recently, the number of hotels in the city keeps rising with great remarkable improvement (Obeke and Abugu, 2021). The hotel business contributes to the growth of the economy of host town all over the world. Butler (2008), Mensah, 2006 and Zengeni et al, 2013 as cited in Amalu and Ajake, (2015) opine that travel and tourism contributes about US\$6 trillion or 9% of global GDP and supporting 260 million jobs making it one of the world's largest industries, (World Tourism Organisation, 2014). The hotel sector in Enugu creates job opportunities for the teeming youths' population giving the industry great opportunities to support the host towns by boosting commerce, tax revenue and personal income of the individual employees. Hotel guests also patronize shopping outlets, event halls, eateries and transportation sectors. And hotels provide halls for business meetings, cyber café, trade exhibitions and conferences which further contribute to growth in the economy of the host town, the state and the country at large. The hotel business attracts other businesses such as banks, retail outlets, laundry services and salons. Hotels businesses generate revenue to the government through tax. In an era of competition and use of technology in service industry, hotels strive to have a competitive edge and secure robust market segment to remain in business. Hotels, especially three- star to five-star hotels are known for offering high-quality services with the aim of attracting customers to ensuring guests 'loyalty. Considering the place of service quality in hotels, it is pertinent to say that the importance of customer service in the hotels businesses cannot be over emphasized. Service quality is very important and necessary to ensure customers' satisfaction and loyalty to hotels (Nikou et al, 2016; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, Berry, 1988 as cited in Nikou and Khiabani, 2020). The rapid increase in the number of

hotels, the stiff competition, and guests churn from one hotel service provider to another, innovation and technology in hotels Enugu metropolis has been a challenge to hotel proprietors and management. Customers of hotels encounter dissatisfaction in service patronage arising from but not limited to the followings: discomfort arising from too much crowd, bad behaviour of employees of service providers, poor service delivery, bad facilities, delay in service delivery, light outage, unavailability of other services such as laundry and gym. Sometimes, the quality of service offered may not meet the need, aspiration, requirement and expectation of the guests. For hotels to excel or simply to survive nowadays, it is essentially required of them to be interested in perception of the services to be in tandem with expectations of guests, which, in fact, is the foundation of repeated business and loyalty. Hotels' guests do not use hotels only for accommodation, there is always a cross-purchasing of other services such as playground, tennis, restaurants, Gym, bar, swimming pool, Spa, salon, event halls and business centre. The role of the personnel cannot be over emphasized to ensuring success in hotel business, because staff deliver and provide services to guests. For example, if hotel employee does not deliver the right service to guests, it will lead to negative effect; as a result, guests might not come back to the same hotel. On the converse, if hotel employees deliver the right service to their guests, the guests will have positive service experience and is very likely to re-patronize the hotel. So, it is very necessary for hotel management and employees to provide quality services to their guests in order to remain competitive in the market place (Anwar and Abd Zebari, 2015; Anwar and Shukur, 2015; Sultan et al. 2020 as cited in Ali, Gardi, Othman, Ahmed, Ismael, Hamza, Aziz, Sabir, Sorguli, Anwar, 2021). However, most times services encounter may fall below customers' expectations. It is for these reasons and more the topic is chosen to unravel whether service quality (SQ) influences customer loyalty to hotels in Enugu Metropolis.

The following hypotheses were postulated to guide the study:

- i. Tangibility as an aspect of service quality dimension does not significantly affect customers' loyalty to Hotels in Enugu metropolis.
- ii. Responsiveness to customers' requests does not significantly and positively enhance customers' loyalty to Hotels in Enugu Metropolis.
- iii. Reliability does not significantly and positively affect customers' loyalty to Hotels in Enugu metropolis.
- iv. Assurance does not significantly enhance customers' loyalty to Hotels in Enugu metropolis.
- v. Empathy does not significantly and positively affect customers' loyalty to Hotels in Enugu metropolis.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.**

In this section, different literatures as related to the study were reviewed in the order of conceptual review, conceptual framework and review of related empirical studies.

## Conceptual Review.

### Concept of Service Quality.

According to Portela and Thanassolis, (2006) and Ehigie, (2006) as cited in Kheng, Mahamad, Ramayah, and Mosahab, (2010), service quality is of priority importance in evaluating hotels' performance, since their continuous existence depends on their service quality levels they provide. Excellence in service quality delivery is essential ingredients to achieving customer loyalty which is the basic goal of business organizations, as a result of the advantages of customer retention. Providing a high level of service quality is very important for service providers like hotels to compete with other peers (Abdul-Qadir, Abubakar and Utomi, 2021). In an era of stiff competition, hotels use high-quality services to attract customers, ensuring customers' loyalty and gain competitive edge. (Almossawi, 2001 as cited in Karim 2020).

Modern day hotels are faced with the task of constantly improving their service quality to meet the growing expectation of customers, compete strongly in the market for their customers' repeat patronage. Service quality is a critical factor in business whether offline or online (Claesson and Persson, 2013). Consequently Service organisations like hotels having realized the need to meet customer's increasing demand adopt technology in their operations to providing quality service to their guests (Karim and Chowdhury, 2014). It contributes to the overall experience for the customer and in turn it affects how the customers perceive the organisation and whether or not they will purchase and repurchase (Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Malhotra, (2002), Shankara, Smith and Rangaswamy (2003) as cited in Claesson and Persson, 2012). Ganguli, and Roy, (2011) as cited in Obasi, Abugu, and Chukwu,(2020) .Ganguli, and Roy, (2011) as cited in Obasi, Abugu, and Chukwu,(2020) opine that service quality is used to judge the service provided. And it is viewed as a tool used in gaining large market share and the profitability of organisations. So service quality is essential for an organisation to gain a market niche, customer retention, as it is a critical determinant of customers' impression about the service.

Bitner and Hubbert, (1994), Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988), Zeithaml, (1988), and Bitner (1990) as cited in Prakash and Mohanty (2013) posit that service quality is usually explained as the customer's impression about the superiority or otherwise of a service provided and its seen as the customer's judgment of the service and its provider. Oyeniya and Abiodun (2010) as cited in Bogati and Vongurai, (2015), are of the view that service quality is the difference between what customers expected (their expectation )for service performance before the service experience and how they perceived (their perception) of the service received. This can be mathematically expressed as service quality (SQ) = Customer expectation (CE) less customer perception (CP), that is  $SQ=CP-CE$ . If the  $CP=CE$ , the customer is satisfied , where the CP is greater CE, the customer is delighted but where CP is less than CE, the customer is dissatisfied (Kotler, Keller and Chernev,2021 ). Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) as cited in Ramya, Kolsaya and Dharanipriya (2019) define service quality as "the delivery of excellent or superior service relative to customer expectation." Enemuo et al, (2023) opine that it is the customer's attitude or judgment about the superiority of a service. It therefore implies that

service quality is determined only when a customer judges a service as meeting or exceeding a predetermined level of expectations. This compels hotels to make serious effort to deliver services that are responsive to customers' expectations and needs to meet or exceed their expectation

Yarimoglu, (2014) identified five aspects of service quality to include tangibles, dependability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The effective combination of these five aspects in the process of service delivery will result to excellent, satisfying service and ultimately loyalty. Generally, quality has been variously defined. Crosby, (1984) as cited in Goyit, (2015) opines that quality occurs when services conform to certain standards. Basically, it's the standard or the requirements of the customer that are used to determine service quality. ISO 9000 (2015), expressed quality as the overall attribute of a company or its services that has the potential to satisfy or exceed customers' desires, wants, expectation and aspiration. From these definitions, a hotel delivers quality services when the customers' expectations are met or exceed their perception in a service encounter. Therefore, organization should pay more attention to improving service quality and preventing service quality problem instead of the correction of quality problems. When service quality is improved and sustained, customer satisfaction, loyalty and profitability will improve also. Headley and Miller, (1993); Spreng, Mackenzie and Olshavsky, (1996); Hossain and Leo, 2009; Ilias and Panagiotis, (2010); Kuo, Chang, Cheng and Lai, (2011), Schiffman, Kanuk and Hansen, (2012) as cited in Izogo and Ogba, (2015) and Tat, Sook-Min, Ai-Chin, Rasli, and Hamid, (2011) as cited in Anasari and Jalees, opine that service quality positively influences customer satisfaction which results into customers' loyalty and makes customer to ultimately remain with the company. Izogo and Ogba (2015) argue that when a firm delivers quality service, the resultant effect will be customer satisfaction and loyalty. According to Siddiq, (2011), service quality helps a company to compete favourably with other competitors, differentiate itself from others and also gain competitive edge. Goyit, (2015) posits that to simplify definition of service quality, it should be viewed into two perspectives as follow:

1. Producer's or Provider's perspective, and
2. Customer's perspective

### **Producer's/Provider's Perspective**

From a producer's or provider's perspective, service quality refers to the level of excellence or superiority of the services they offer to their customers. It encompasses various aspects that contribute to the overall customer experience and satisfaction with the service. The key elements that a producer or provider of service considers when assessing service quality: Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, Tangibility, Empathy, Process efficiency, and Innovation. Through prioritizing these elements, a producer or provider can enhance the overall quality of their service, increase customer satisfaction, and build long-term relationships with their customers. Continuous monitoring,

feedback collection, and improvement initiatives are typically undertaken to ensure that service quality remains consistent and aligns with customer expectations.

### **Customer's Perspective.**

From a consumer perspective, service quality refers to the evaluation and perception of the excellence or superiority of a service based on their individual experiences and expectations. Consumers assess service quality based on their interactions with the service provider and their overall satisfaction with the service received. Some key factors that influence the consumer perspective of service quality are as follow: Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy, Tangibles, Process efficiency, Value for money, Emotional experience(level of comfort or enjoyment customer felt in using a service).Consumers' perception of service quality is subjective and can vary based on their individual expectations, previous experiences, and cultural factors. They often rely on their personal interactions, word-of-mouth recommendations, online reviews, and their overall satisfaction with the service received to form their judgment of service quality. Positive experiences and high-quality service can lead to customer loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and repeat business for service providers.

The distinctive characteristics of services which are: inseparability, intangibility, heterogeneity, etc, makes it quite challenging to make many inroads into the analysis of service quality. According to Kotler (2003), service firms that are run professionally, operate commonly using the followings: a strategic concept, executive management commitment to quality, high standards, process efficiency self-service technologies, systems for monitoring service performance, innovation and customer complaints, and an emphasis on employee satisfaction. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) as cited in Kotler (2003), Karim, (2020) and Temba (2013), developed a model called Service-Quality Model as shown in Fig. 1. Although there are several methods and approaches to measure service quality, and different organizations may use different techniques based on their specific needs and industry. The SERVQUAL is the generally acceptable model for measuring service quality. SERVQUAL is a widely recognized model developed by Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry. It identifies five dimensions of service quality: reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness. SERVQUAL employs a questionnaire-based survey to measure customer perceptions and expectations across these dimensions.

However, there are certain gaps in the SERVQUAL model that have been identified over time. These gaps highlight the limitations of the model in capturing the complete picture of service quality. Here are the main gaps in SERVQUAL.

**Gap 1: Gap between consumer expectations and management perception.** This gap happens when an organization lacks accurate knowledge or understanding about customer expectations within the company.

Management may have an inadequate knowledge about what customers expectations truly are, which may give rise to a disconnect between the intended service quality and the actual service delivered.

**Gap 2: Gap between Management Perceptions and Service Quality Specifications:**

This gap refers to the inconsistency between management's perception of the service quality they want to deliver and the actual specifications put in place to achieve it. It occurs when the management fails to translate their understanding of customer expectations into clear, actionable service quality standards.

**Gap 3: Gap between Service Quality Specifications and Service Delivery:**

This gap occurs during the service delivery process. It arises when the stated service standards are not effectively implemented or met. Factors such as lack of employee training, resource constraints, or operational inefficiencies can lead to a discrepancy between what was promised and what is actually delivered to the customer.

**Gap 4: Gap between Service Delivery and External Communications:**

This gap exists when a company fails to meet customer expectations and is unable to effectively manage customer perceptions after the service encounter. If the customer's perception of the service falls short of their expectations, it can lead to negative word-of-mouth and dissatisfaction, even if the service delivery itself was technically sound.

**Gap 5: Gap between Customer Expectations and Customer Perceptions:**

This gap represents the difference between what customers expect from a service and their actual perceptions of the service received. It highlights the subjective nature of customer perception and the potential for variations in how customers interpret and evaluate the service quality.

These gaps indicate the challenges in accurately measuring and delivering service quality. They emphasize the need for organizations to bridge these gaps by understanding customer expectations, aligning internal processes with customer requirements, and effectively managing communication and customer perceptions throughout the service encounter

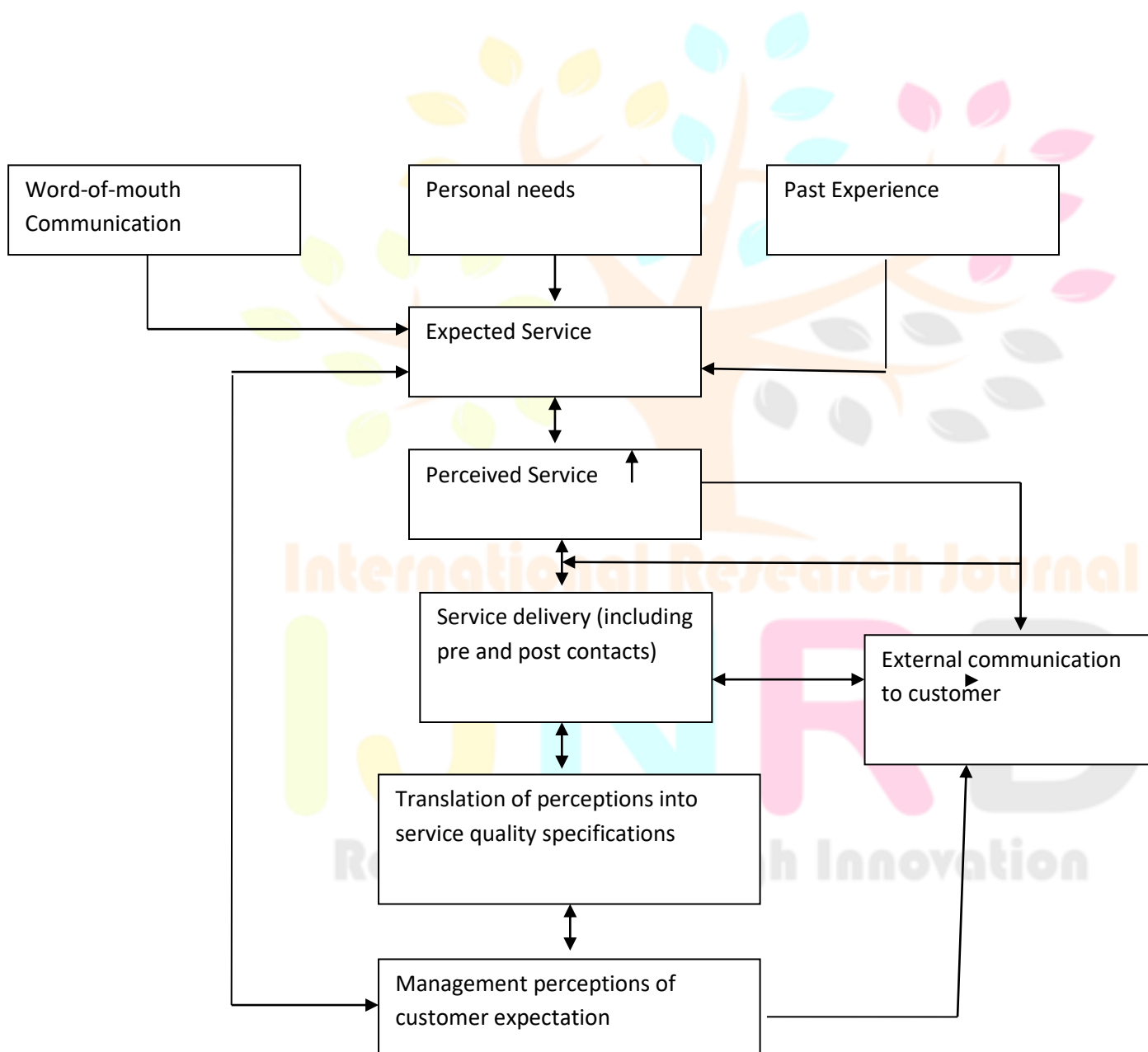


Fig. 1: Service Quality Model

Source: Parasuraman A, Valarie, A Zeithaml and Leonard L. B (1985) A Conceptual Model of Service Quality in its Implication for Future Research in Journal of Marketing Vol. 49 pp 41 -50.

## **DIMENSIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY.**

Service quality dimensions refer to the various aspects or characteristics that customers use to evaluate the quality of a service they receive. These dimensions are used by organizations to assess and improve the overall quality of their services. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) as cited in Mata, (2020), Karim, (2020) and Kumar, Kee and Charles, (2010), came up with ten dimensions for measuring quality of service. Those initial dimensions were tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, competence, courtesy, access, security, credibility, communication, and understanding the customer. This ten-dimension method of measuring service quality was opposed by Cronin and Taylor (1992) as cited in Goyit, (2015) who did not only agree with the measurement issue, but also criticized the conceptualisation of SERVQUAL, and argued that the perceptions aspect of SERVQUAL was a more preferable measurement instrument than SERVQUAL itself. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) revised their SERVQUAL instrument by carrying out a fresh study, which in its pure form, changed some scale measurement elements and changed wording relating to those scales. They came up with a direct measurement relating to the essence of each dimension reported by the respondents. SERVQUAL, the modified dimensions are tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988 and Kumar, Kee and Charles, 2020). According to Parasuraman et al (1988), Fitzsimmons, Zeithaml, (1996) and Tjiptono, (1996) as cited in Qendah, (2017), while different models may propose slightly different dimensions, a widely recognized and commonly used model is the SERVQUAL model, which identifies five dimensions of service quality, namely:

- a. **Tangibles:** Tangibles refer to the physical or tangible elements associated with the service, such as the appearance of the physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials. It includes factors like the cleanliness and aesthetics of the environment, the appearance and professionalism of the service providers, adequate parking space and the availability and clarity of information (Siddiq, 2011; Titko, Lace and Koslovskis, 2012; Qendah, 2017; Kheng, Mohamad and Ramayah, 2010 and Ramya, Kowsalya and Dharanipriya, 2019).
- b. **Reliability:** Reliability refers to the ability of the service provider to perform the promised service accurately and dependably. It includes aspects like the consistency of service delivery, the ability to meet deadlines and fulfill commitments, and the accuracy and precision of service outcomes (Titko, Lace and Kozlovskis, 2013 and Qendah, 2017).
- c. **Responsiveness:** Responsiveness relates to the willingness and promptness of the service provider to assist customers and provide a quick response to their needs, requests, complaints, or problems. It

involves factors like the attentiveness, willingness to help, and speed of service providers in addressing customer inquiries, complaints, or requests for assistance. It's all about swift delivery of service requests (Siddiq, 2011 and Goyit, 2015).

- d. Assurance: Assurance pertains to the knowledge, competence, and credibility of the service providers, as well as their ability to instill trust and confidence in customers. It includes factors like the expertise and qualifications of service personnel, their ability to convey trust and reliability, and the availability of information or guarantees that enhance customer confidence Qendah, 2017; Shanka, 2012; Goyit, 2015; Izogo and Ogba, 2013).
- e. Empathy: Empathy refers to the extent to which service providers demonstrate care, understanding, and personalised attention to customers' individual needs and circumstances. It involves factors like the friendliness, attentiveness, and individualized treatment provided by service personnel, as well as the organization's efforts to understand and meet customer expectations, having customers' best interest at heart and understanding of customer needs (Qendah, 2017; Izogo and Ogba, 2013 and Supriyanto, Wiyono and Burhanuddin, 2021).

By considering and addressing these five dimensions, organizations like hotels can strive to improve the overall quality of their services and meet or exceed customer expectations.

### Steps in Achieving Service Quality

There are various approaches to improve the quality of service by an organization. Some of the steps as stated by Palmer, (2005) are as follow:

**Organisational Commitment to Quality:** When organisation is quality driven, it will ensure that every employee imbibe the culture and make it to succeed.

**Customer Orientation:** Every employee of the organisation has to be customer-centric and toward providing service that customer will consider to be of quality (Stanton, 1981 as cited in Goyit, 2015).

**Measurement of Quality:** There should be a parameter for measuring quality from the customer's point of view in an organisation.

**Set Quality Goals and Institute Reward Systems:** Setting quality goals is very crucial to gain large market share and for sustainability. When quality goals are well spelt out, employees of service firm can provide superior service (Khan and Fasih, 2014)

**Employee Involvement:** Organisations should purposely involve their employees to contribute both in their ideas driving quality.

**Defects Identification and their Sources:** To remain relevant in the market and competitive, companies have to adopt a strategy to identify mistakes and rectify them to prevent reoccurrence. This can be easily achieved by using modern technology.

**Improvement:** Organizations like hotels shall continually improve the effectiveness of the quality system through the use of objectives, audit/inspection results, data collection and analysis, corrective and preventive actions, and management review, about a particular practice or service to benchmark performance, track and validate indicators that affect outcomes, and recognize problems in processes and management (Alex, 2022 and Kennedy, 2017).

## **CUSTOMER LOYALTY.**

Customer in hotels implies guest. A guest can be defined as anybody who books sleeping accommodation in the hotel (section 24 of liquor licensing law as cited in Olufemi, 2019). According to Kim et al., (2007) as cited in Keshavarz, Jamshidi, Bakhtazma (2016), customer loyalty is defined as the customer attitude toward the service formed by customer's past experience. Chahal and Bala, 2012; Siripipatthanakul and Bhandar, 2021; Siripipatthanakul and Sixl-Daniell, (2021); Sosanuy et al., (2021); Nuanchaona et al., (2021); Nurittamont, (2016), as cited in Kanyama, Nurittamont, Siripipatthanakul (2022); Anabila (2021), posit that customer loyalty can be attitudinal loyalty - positive attitude, inner conviction and strong affinity toward a brand and behavioural loyalty i.e. repeated purchase behaviour, positive word of mouth communication about the service and the providers. A loyal customer prefers the same service, the providers, and may refer friends and family to use it. One of the ways to measure customer loyalty is through behavioural intention which is intention to reuse or a eagerness to repatronise next time. Jani and Han (2014) posit that hotel guest loyalty is a favourable disposition toward a service coupled with an intention to regularly and consistently reuse the service. According to Alaid and Zhou, (2013), Zarei et al., 2013, Kitapci et al., (2014), Yapp et al., (2018), Odoom et al., (2019) as cited in Siripipatthanakul and Bhandar, 2021, loyal customer is one who is likely to return in the future, reuse the service next time and loyalty is a determinant of future customer's behaviour. Customer loyalty implies behavioural intention to spread a positive word about a service, its provider and refer others to use the services. Customer loyalty is measured by how often a customer intentionally revisit service provider and refer or recommend others to use it. Therefore, customer loyalty can measure hotel service quality by frequency of revisit in the future and recommendation to others. For businesses seeking to gain and retain customer loyalty in today's highly competitive market, the necessity of service quality cannot be overemphasized.

## **HOTELS.**

Hotels are business establishment that provide accommodation, hospitality and other related services to guests and travelers. They provide different services using their amenities and facilities to make guests have some comfort and convenience while lodging in the hotels. Hotels are categorized based on their sizes, locations, and target markets, levels of services, inside and outside facilities, number of rooms, ownership and affiliation. The

National Tourism Development Corporation regulation of 1997 graded hotels into one star, two stars, three stars, four stars and five stars hotel.

One-star Hotel contains minimum of 10 bedrooms and other facilities, two-star Hotels are made up of 20 bedrooms and accompanying facilities, a three-star Hotels contains 30 bedrooms and other conditions, four-stars Hotels has minimum of 50 bedrooms and other facilities and finally five-stars Hotels have minimum of 100 bedrooms among other conditions such as apartments, banquet halls, conference halls, swimming pool(s),sports/games facilities, restaurants, supermarkets and other retail outlets, cyber cafes and etc (The National Tourism Development Corporation regulation of 1997 and Olufemi, 2019). For the purpose of this study, the following hotels are selected: Nike Lake Resort with 210 rooms at Nike in Enugu East Local Government Authority(LGA) , a five-star hotel; the Gate Luxury apartment at Peak Drive GRA ,Enugu North LGA, a five-star hotel, Macdons Guest House at Uwani in Enugu South LGA with 90 rooms as a four-star hotel, Carlton Swiss Grand Hotel at 47, Nza street Independence Layout, Enugu North LGA as a four- Star Hotel, Hotel Sylvia, Independence Layout, Enugu North LGA as a three- star hotel.

### ENUGU METROPOLIS.

Enugu metropolis, Nigeria is made up of Enugu North, Enugu South and Enugu East Local Government Areas. (Iyida, 2015 and Umeora, 2018). The population was 711,664 as at 2006 (National Population Commission, 2006 as cited in Umeora, 2018).

### CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

#### INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

#### DEPENDENT VARIABLES

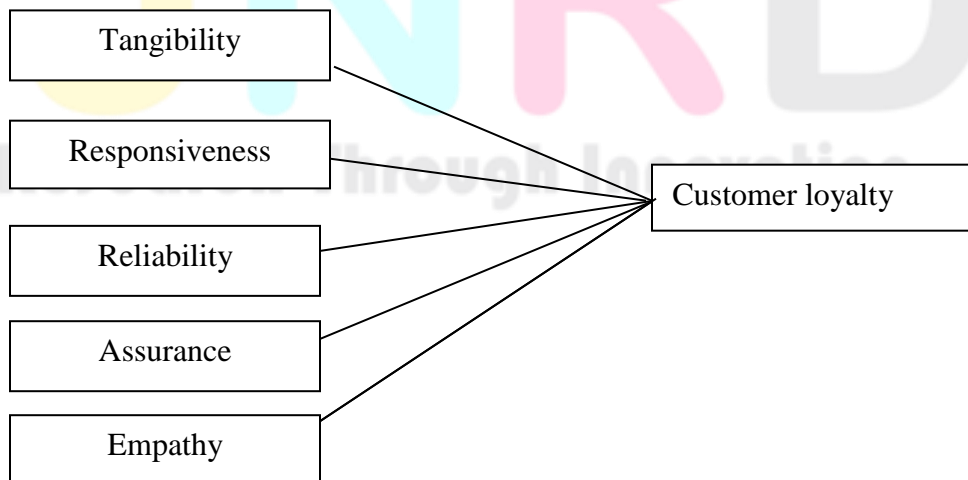


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework/Proposed Model for the study.

Sources: Adapted from:

1. Kanyama , J., Nurittamont ,W., Siripipatthanakul, S.,(2022). Hotel Service Quality and Its Effect on Customer Loyalty: The Case of Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand during COVID-19 Pandemic. Journal of Management in Business, Healthcare, and Education (JMBHE).
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## EMPRICAL REVIEW.

**Al-Bostanji (2013)**, conducted a study to examine the influence of service quality (responsiveness, empathy, and tangibility) on customer loyalty in five-star hotels in Riyadh. The findings revealed a strong impact of service quality on customer loyalty in these hotels.

In a similar vein, **Al-Wishah et al. (2022)** investigated the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty in Jordanian Banks. Their study, titled "Service Quality and Customer Loyalty: Evidence from Jordanian Banks," demonstrated a significant positive effect of service quality, both individually and collectively, on customer loyalty.

**Indah et al. (2021)** focused on the determinants of loyalty in their study. Their objective was to assess the impact of customer satisfaction and bank image on customer loyalty at Pt. Bank Muamalat Indonesia, Tbk, and Panyabungan Sub-Branch Office. The results indicated that customer satisfaction partially influenced customer loyalty, while the bank's image had a significant effect on customer loyalty. When considered together, customer satisfaction and the bank's image had a significant and notable impact on customer loyalty.

**Poku and Soali (2013)** explored how service quality affects customer loyalty in three different hotels in Kumasi, Ghana: Golden Tulip (4-star), Miklin Hotel (3-star), and Lizzie's Hotel (2-star). The study randomly selected 50 customers seeking lodging and boarding services, as well as five staff members from each hotel. By employing the SERVQUAL model through surveys and interviews, the research revealed that customer satisfaction is not solely determined by the hotels' rankings but rather by the value-for-money service quality that generates customer loyalty. Interestingly, Miklin Hotel had the most satisfied and loyal customers, followed by Golden Tulip Hotel and then Lizzie's Hotel, in contrast to their classification order. The variables of "responsiveness,"

"empathy," and "assurance" significantly influenced customer loyalty in both Miklin and Golden Tulip hotels, while "reliability" played a crucial role in Lizzie's Hotel. However, "tangibility" did not significantly contribute to customer loyalty across all hotels, as guests were less satisfied with it and tended to overlook it in their search for alternatives.

**Anabila et al., (2014)**, conducted a study that examined the relationship between service quality, customer satisfaction, customer delight, and customer loyalty. The results demonstrated a significant positive effect of service quality on both customer satisfaction and customer delight. In addition, customer satisfaction and customer delight effectively mediated the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty.

**Kanyama, Nurittamont, and Siripipatthanakul (2022)** conducted a study on the effect of hotel service quality on customer loyalty in Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand during Covid-19 pandemic. The regression model revealed a significant impact of hotel service quality on customer loyalty. Specifically, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy were significant predictors of hotel customer loyalty, while tangibles and reliability did not exhibit significant influence. However, Pearson correlation analysis indicated that all dimensions of hotel service quality were significantly related to customer loyalty. Among these dimensions, empathy showed the highest correlation with hotel customer loyalty, followed by assurance, responsiveness, tangibles, and reliability, respectively.

## **METHODOLOGY.**

This study aimed to investigate the effect of service quality on customer loyalty to selected hotels in Enugu metropolis. A research questionnaire was utilized for data collection, and personal distribution and collection methods were employed. The sample consisted of guests from five hotels in Enugu metropolis, including two five-star hotels, two four-star hotels, and one three-star hotel. A convenient sample approach was utilized to select 250 guests who were all over 25 years old. Descriptive analysis, such as percentages, was used to describe the characteristics of the sample. The correlation between independent variables was examined using Pearson correlation coefficients. The measurement instruments' validity and reliability were assessed using Cronbach's Alpha for reliability and face and content validation methods. The Likert Scale, with values ranging from strongly agree (SA) to strongly disagree (SD), was used to measure the main variables.

The SERVQUAL model was adopted as the independent variable, based on previous studies by Parasuraman et al. (1988), Fitzsimmons, Zeithaml (1996), Tjiptono (1996), Qendah (2017), and Al-Wishah et al. (2022). Customer loyalty was based on the studies conducted by Anabila et al. (2021) and Kanyama, Nurittamont, and Siripipatthanakul (2022). A total of 250 copies of questionnaire were distributed to the selected hotels in Enugu Metropolis, Nigeria, with a response rate of 100%. The collected data was coded and analyzed using Pearson

correlation to confirm the model assumptions. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the demographics of the respondents, and the analysis was conducted using SPSS version 20.

## RESULTS/FINDINGS.

The questionnaire was allocated to the five selected hotels as follows: Nike Lake Resort (75, 30%), Gate Luxury Apartments (40, 16%), Macdons Guest House (25, 10%), Carlton Swiss Grand Hotel (60, 24%), and Hotel Sylvia (50, 20%). Regarding the demographics of the respondents, 86% were married, while 14% were single. In terms of educational qualifications, 17.2% had SSCE, 52% had BSc degree, and 30.8% had postgraduate degree. The gender distribution was 72% male and 28% female. The duration of customers' hotel usage varied, with 8% using the hotels for less than 1 year, 16% for 1-2 years, 24% for 2-3 years, 21.2% for 3-4 years, and 30.8% for more than 4 years.

Table 1: Pearson Correlation (r) Between Service Quality and Customer Loyalty

Variables	Correlation (r) with Customer Loyalty (CL)	p-value	Action
Service quality:			
Tangibility	498.484	0.000	Reject Ho <sub>1</sub>
Reliability	226.371	0.000	Reject Ho <sub>2</sub>
Responsiveness	227.655	0.000	Reject Ho <sub>3</sub>
Assurance	273.232	0.000	Reject Ho <sub>4</sub>
Empathy.	662.500	0.000	Reject Ho <sub>5</sub>

Note: Correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (Two-tailed).

The result generally affirmed that Service quality dimensions –Tangibility, Responsiveness, Reliability , Assurance and Empathy has significant positive effect on customer loyalty to hotels in Enugu Metropolis . The result of the data analysis indicates P-value of 0 .000 for all the Service quality dimensions (Tangibility,

Responsiveness, Reliability, Assurance and Empathy). The p-values for all service quality dimensions were 0.000, indicating a high positive significant effect on customer loyalty to hotels in Enugu Metropolis, Enugu state, Nigeria. This implies that continuously improving of the service quality will invariably increase the guests' loyalty to the hotels in Enugu Metropolis, Enugu state, Nigeria. This finding affirms Kanyama, Nurittamont, Siripipatthanakul (2022), Al-Wishah et al (2022) and Al-Bostanji (2013) research findings that service quality has high significant positive effect on customer loyalty.

## CONCLUSION

The study revealed a positive relationship between hotel service quality dimensions (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) and customer loyalty in Enugu Metropolis, Enugu State, Nigeria. Improving these service quality dimensions, such as tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, can increase customer loyalty. Hotel proprietors and management should focus on implementing these dimensions to enhance customer loyalty. This includes paying attention to room size, ambience/decor, internet service availability, modern furniture, cleanliness, safety, providing services on time, demonstrating competence, responsiveness to customer needs, and ensuring employees' knowledge, approachability, and ethical conduct.

## RECOMMENDATION.

This study examines the effect of service quality on customer loyalty to the hotels in Enugu Metropolis, Enugu State. Hotels should work arduously to continuously improve their service quality which is a driver of customer loyalty which results to hotel performance and profitability. The study only covered Nike Lake Resort the Gate Luxury apartment Macdons Guest House, Carlton Swiss Grand Hotel, Hotel Sylvia, in Enugu metropolis, and did not include other hotels in Enugu state. The recommendation is for future studies to widen the area of studies, for example the entire Enugu state or the whole southeast zone.

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