

## **EFFECT OF SERVICE QUALITY ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION OF HOTELS IN NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

*In spite of the appreciable growth and expansion recorded in the hotel industry, there are still customer complaints about hotels service quality and which is believed to be essential in enhancing customer satisfaction. The study aimed to measure the effect of service quality on customer satisfaction of hotels in North central Nigeria. For this purpose, the study developed an instrument based on SERVQUAL model using five service quality dimensions, of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, Assurance and empathy, A survey research design was adopted, a purposive and convenience sampling technique was used to collect data from 403 customers of selected 3-star hotels in North central Nigeria through a structured likert scale questionnaire of five points. Data were analyzed using the Partial Least Square- Structural Equation Modelling with the aid of SmartPLSv3. The study found a significant negative effect of tangibility on customer satisfaction, a significant positive effect of reliability on customer satisfaction, a significant positive effect of responsiveness, assurance and empathy on customer satisfaction. Based on the findings the study recommends that hotels in north central Nigeria should managers should focus on maintaining a pleasant and well-maintained physical environment and equipment's, enhance reliability, improve responsiveness, foster assurance and promote empathy processes so as to enhance service quality and improve customer satisfaction levels.*

**Keywords:** *Service Quality (SERVQUAL), Customer satisfaction, Hotel Industry*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Globalization is cutting across barriers between different industries and this has opened up competition among firms for customers in the worldwide markets (Rastogi, 1996, Kumar 2017, Ping-Lung et al 2019)). The basis of this competition is quality, cost and performance of organizations products and services since companies have realized over a period of time that the key to business success is retaining the customer (Gurbinder and Maneek 2016, Kumar 2017). However as posited by Kumar (2017), Asnawi et al (2020) and Priyo et al (2019) that the challenge marketers face today is how to make customers loyal to their product and services for a long-term profit. This exerts continuous pressure on competing companies to upgrade quality, reduce costs and develop superior products and services in terms of customer's need and expectations. In order to do this effectively, firms engage themselves in relentless pursuit of productivity and efficiency, technological development, innovation, creativity and flexibility to retain customers (Gurbinder & Maneek, 2016), for the cost of attracting new customers is five times more than the cost of retaining old customers (Kotler 2010, Edward & Sahadev 2011)

The hotel and hospitality industry in general being one of the fastest growing industries around the world, and also a major employer of labour in many countries (Jauhari, 2012, Global Hotel Research Report 2018) which also compete aggressively for market share in the tourism and hospitality industry. This industry is worth US\$2.3 trillion accounting for 10.2% of the global gross domestic product (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2017), is not left out in this competition, as such end users have become more critical in their business dealings. In Nigeria the hotel industry is growing at an even higher rate as reported by PWC Hotel outlook (2019) and highly competitive with various operators including many international hotel chains in operations and many more new investors in the sector. This makes the hotel industry a rapidly developing global industry.

In the service industry, customer satisfaction is a key determinant of business success. One factor that influences customer satisfaction is the responses of service providers to customer needs. The SERVQUAL framework, which measures service quality across five dimensions (reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles), provides a useful tool for evaluating customer satisfaction.

## **Statement of the Problem**

It has been established that Service quality and loyalty are essential factors for attracting new customers and retaining old ones in every business and most especially in the service sectors. In order to be competitive, sustainable, and lucrative in the service business, hotel managements are expected to concentrate on the elements that would influence customer happiness and loyalty (priyo et al 2019) with the believe that Service quality and consumer loyalty are essential ideas that organizations must comprehend so as to stay focused in business and thus develop it (Joudeh & Dandis, 2018).

But despite the introduction of service quality processes so as to enhance and promote customer satisfaction that would lead to customer loyalty, the hotel sector is still experiencing a high rate of hotel switching among customers up to the extent that some hotels are left without reasonable customers, this has clearly signified the lack of loyalty among such customers. Furthermore, in spite of the many academic journals of published research on service quality, it is limited in hotel sector. Many studies like Kumar (2017), Liu et al (2016) and Joudeh and Dandis (2018) have been conducted with reference to telecom industry, Banks and other service sectors but limited in the hotel sector as also agree by Flores et al (2020). It is against this background that this study was carried out investigate the relationship between SERVQUAL dimensions on customer satisfaction in the hotel industry in north central Nigeria.

The study is guided by the following core objective: -

- i. To determine the effect of tangibility on customer satisfaction of hotels in north central Nigeria.
- ii. To ascertain the effect of responsiveness on customer satisfaction of hotels in north central Nigeria.
- iii. To assess the effect of reliability on customer satisfaction of hotels in north central Nigeria.
- iv. To evaluate the effect of assurance on customer satisfaction of hotels in north central Nigeria.
- v. To assess the effect of empathy on customer satisfaction of hotels in north central Nigeria.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Tangibility***

Physical buildings, tools or equipment used to perform services, and employee appearance are all examples of tangible items. Signs, comfort, accessibility, spaciousness, functioning, and cleanliness are examples of physical facilities (D’Cunha and Suresh, 2015). Furthermore, this component is mostly linked to service variety in order to match client expectations (Caruana, 2002). The physical proof of the service, such as the appearance of the tools, equipment, and physical facilities utilized to offer the service, is known as tangibility (Miah, 2021). Akdere et al., (2018) sees tangibles as physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel. Ali et al., (2021) defined tangibles as the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials, Physical appearance is the appearance of the equipment, appearance of the personnel, the look of building and renovation.

### ***Reliability***

Often, consumers’ perception of reliability for a service plays a vital role in measuring the performance of that service (Munusamy et al., 2010). Akdere et al., (2018) ascertain that reliability is the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. For Service consistency and dependability are part of reliability, which refers to the capacity to supply the service that customers want reliably and accurately (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Service providers are expected to deliver services on time and follow their commitments, especially when it comes to billing accuracy, keeping accurate records, and delivering services to customers (Kondasani and Panda, 2015). The term Reliability can also be defined as an amalgamation of the right order accomplishment; accurate records; precise reference; right in the bill; results are more accurate than commissions; keeping the promise of service (Miah 2021).

### ***Responsiveness***

Nabila, (2016) define Responsiveness as the willingness to help customers and to provide prompt services. Responsiveness is the willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service. This dimension focuses in the attitude and promptness in dealing with customer requests, questions, complaints and problems. It

also focuses on punctuality, presence, professional commitment of the employees or staff. It can be calculated on the length of time customers wait for assistance, answers to questions. The conditions of responsiveness can be improved by continuously viewing the process of service delivery and employees attitude towards requests of customers (Dawi et al 2016). Akdere et al., (2018) sees responsiveness as the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service as Ali et al (2021) posits that responsiveness is being willing to help, it refers to the organization's readiness to settle issues and availability to provide fast service.

### ***Assurance***

Employee knowledge, civility, and the capacity to transmit trust and confidence are all examples of assurance (Miah 2021). Employees should be knowledgeable, courteous and skilled in order to deliver the greatest service to their consumers. Courtesy is defined as civility, respect, consideration, and kindness, as well as consideration for the property of the consumer. Trustworthiness, believability, and honesty are all terms used to convey trust and confidence. It entails thinking about the customer's best interests, such as the features of contact employees (Kitapci et al., 2014). According to Ali et al (2021) Assurance indicates the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence. It is important for the hotel or service organization to prove that it's trustable and worth the money, the customer is paying. The consumer should feel safe when he or she consumes different services from a hotel and would like to feel secure during his stay (Anwar & Louis, 2017).

### ***Empathy***

The dimension of empathy generally involves care and personalized attention that a firm can provide to its customers in terms of accessibility, communication and understanding of the service being provided (Bedi, 2010). It is defined as the caring; individualized attention provided to the customers by their service firms. This dimension tries to convey the meaning through personalized or individualized services that customers are unique and special to the firm. According to Miah (2021) Empathy refers to a caring attitude toward consumers, as well as a thorough understanding of their needs and the provision of personalized service. The ability to respond to client needs, such as identifying regular customers and learning their individual wants, is referred to as capacity to understand customer needs (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Empathy is caring about others and providing individualized attention to customers, Empathy can also be seen as a care, an individual's care of a firms customers (Othman, .& Owen, 2001).

### ***Customer Satisfaction***

Customer satisfaction refers to the ability of product or service to meet or surpass the customers' expectation (Yaqub et al., 2019). Attainment of customer satisfaction is the ultimate objective of firms because this will serve as the baseline for the affirmation of customer loyalty and long-term relationship development. According to Liang and Zhang (2012), customer satisfaction is the evaluation of the perceived discrepancy between prior expectations and the actual performance of the service, more so customer satisfaction is the consumer's assessment of goods and services in terms of expectation that has been rendered by the customer (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012). Lesmana et al ( 2021) posits that service quality can thus be defined as the difference between customer expectations of service and service perception. If expectations are greater than performance, then perceived quality is less than satisfactory and hence customer dissatisfaction occurs (Surahman & Yasa, 2020)

## **EMPIRICAL REVIEW**

### ***Tangibility and Customer Satisfaction***

Junaid et al. (2018) examined the effect of service quality on customer satisfaction in the hotel industry in Pakistan. The study used a survey questionnaire to collect data from 400 customers of five-star hotels in Pakistan, which was analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM). The findings of the study revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between tangibility and customer satisfaction in the hotel industry. The study recommends that hotel managers should invest in improving their physical facilities to enhance customer satisfaction and increase loyalty. Another study conducted by Han et al. (2017) in South Korea. The study focused on the retail banking sector, and the sample size consisted of 500 customers of

various banks. The study used a structured questionnaire to collect data, which was analyzed using the partial least squares (PLS) technique. The findings of the study indicated a significant positive relationship between tangibility and customer satisfaction in the retail banking industry. The study recommends that retail banks should pay attention to improving their physical aspects to enhance customer satisfaction. Similarly, a study conducted by Amin et al. (2016) in Malaysia explored the impact of SERVQUAL tangibility on customer satisfaction in the healthcare industry. The sample size for this study included 300 patients from various hospitals. The researchers employed a structured questionnaire to collect data, which was analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis. The findings of this study revealed a significant positive relationship between SERVQUAL tangibility and customer satisfaction in the healthcare sector. It recommends that healthcare providers invest in improving the tangibility elements to enhance patient satisfaction and overall healthcare experience.

### ***Reliability and Customer Satisfaction***

Hameed et al (2015) in their study posits that Customer satisfaction is a collective outcome of perception, evaluation, and psychological reaction to the Service quality. Due to the increasing competition of E-commerce business and the high demand of the customers, service quality is the fundamental factor to measure customer's satisfaction within such business. They examine the influence of reliability dimension of E-commerce on Libyan customers satisfaction. Data was collected from a sample size of 384 who were issued with a structured likert scale-based questionnaire. The study findings show that there is a very strong relationship between quality of service (Reliability) and customer satisfaction. The study recommends that E-commerce business promoters must provide secure online transactions to make customers feel comfortable. Chege (2021) examines the influence of service reliability on customer satisfaction in the insurance industry in Kenya. The study was anchored on the Assimilation Contrast Theory and employed a descriptive research design. Primary data was collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics where the mean and standard deviation were determined. The study employed the linear mixed effect models of structural equation modeling (SEM) considering the multi-level structure of the data collected. The study found that there was a variation of levels of customer satisfaction across entities but this was not attributed to service reliability. The conclusion made was that service reliability significantly influenced customer satisfaction in the insurance industry in Kenya at the customer level but did not significantly influence the variations of customer satisfaction between the insurance companies. Similarly, Rajasekhan, et al (2013) analyses students' satisfaction with university performance regarding the reliability dimension, ability of professors and staff to perform the promised services with quality to students in the post-graduate courses offered by Sri Venkateswara University in India. The sample respondents 323 were administered with schedule based on stratified random technique. Statistical techniques such as factor analysis, t-test and correlation analysis were used to analyze the collected data. These results revealed that there seems to be a moderate correlation between overall satisfaction and the selected reliability service quality dimension attributes.

### ***Responsiveness and customer Satisfaction***

Sharma, et al (2022) posits that the ease and convenience of online shopping are shifting the customers to e-tailers. This has prompted offline retailers to re-examine behavioral patterns along with a reconfiguration for a responsive retail model. The paper investigates the influence of responsiveness on customer satisfaction, cross-buying behavior, revisit intention and referral behavior. Data were collected via a survey answered by 793 fashion customers from India, and analyzed, partial least square structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was employed. The findings suggest that customer satisfaction acts as the biggest contributor to referral behaviour followed by cross-buying behaviour and revisit intentions. Onyishi et al. (2018) investigated the relationship between responsiveness and patient satisfaction in a public hospital in Nigeria. The study found that patients who perceived higher levels of responsiveness from healthcare providers reported higher levels of satisfaction with the quality of care received. The authors concluded that responsiveness is an important factor in influencing patient satisfaction in healthcare settings. Similarly, a study by Adegoke et al. (2019) examined the impact of responsiveness on patient satisfaction in a private hospital in Nigeria. The study found a positive association between responsiveness and patient satisfaction, with patients who perceived higher levels of responsiveness reporting higher levels of satisfaction with the



care they received. The authors suggested that healthcare providers should prioritize responsiveness as a key component of service quality in order to enhance patient satisfaction.

### ***Assurance and Customer Satisfaction***

The assurance dimension SERVQUAL model focuses on the competence and courtesy service providers. A study conducted by Teshnizi, et al (2018) examined the relationship between service quality dimensions of assurance, and patient satisfaction in an Iranian hospital. The study found that assurance was a significant predictor of patient satisfaction, with higher levels of assurance being associated with higher levels of patient satisfaction. Abidin et al. (2019) examine the impact of SERVQUAL assurance on customer satisfaction in Malaysian service industries, with a sample size of 384 customers from various service industries. The study used structural equation modeling (SEM) to analyze the data and found that SERVQUAL assurance had a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction. Similarly, another study conducted by Arasli et al. (2018) in Turkey with a sample size of 550 customers from the banking sector, used regression analysis to examine the relationship between SERVQUAL assurance and customer satisfaction. The study found that SERVQUAL assurance had a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction.

### ***Empathy and Customer Satisfaction***

Waseen et al (2018) study investigated the indirect effect of employee empathy on customer loyalty and loyalty outcomes through intervening variables. Data were collected through the online survey from 360 useable responses collected from active users of telecommunication services from the province of Anhui, China. To test the model, structural equation modeling was applied by using AMOS 21. The findings confirm the positive and indirect effect of Employee Empathy on Customer Loyalty and loyalty outcomes. Jaramillo and Valenzuela. (2016).. A conceptual model is tested using survey responses from 300 customers from two Chilean banks. Model hypotheses were tested with hierarchical regression analyses. Results indicate that both satisfaction with the supplier partially mediate the link between customer orientation with the supplier and customer loyalty. Results also demonstrate that supplier customer orientation also affects loyalty directly. The study findings shows that salesperson empathy has a direct effect on both customer satisfaction with the supplier. Customer orientation is directly related to customer satisfaction and supplier trust. Finally, research findings demonstrate that empathy augments the positive effect of customer orientation on customer satisfaction. findings shows that both customer orientation and salesperson's empathy play a critical role in influencing customer's opinions about their relationship with a firm and eventually lead to supplier loyalty. These results highlight the importance of instilling a customer-oriented culture and the need of hiring empathetic salespeople who are genuinely interested in serving the customer

## **Theoretical Review**

### ***The Gronroos Model***

Gronroos (1984) developed the service quality model, also known as the Nordic model, which emphasizes the importance of understanding customers' perception of service for business success. Service quality management involves minimizing the gap between perceived and expected quality to achieve customer satisfaction. The model comprises three components: technical quality, functional quality, and image. Technical quality refers to customers' perceptions of service encounters, while functional quality focuses on the process of service delivery. Corporate image represents customers' view of the company or brand and is influenced by technical and functional qualities. By applying the Gronroos model, hotel management can establish a cooperative relationship with customers, align technical and functional qualities, and meet customer expectations. The Gronroos service quality model provides valuable insights into understanding and managing service quality from the customer's perspective. It highlights the significance of not only the outcome of service but also the process and corporate image in shaping customers' perceptions. By adopting this model, businesses, including hotels, can strive to provide the desired and needed service, enhance customer satisfaction, and build a positive brand image. It also emphasizes the importance of aligning customer expectations with service delivery, as well as the influence of factors like marketing activities and word-of-mouth on the corporate image.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted the survey research design, a structured five-point likert scale questionnaire was use to obtain data from customers of selected twenty (21) selected hotels with three (3) hotel each from the north central state capitals including Abuja. A total of five hundred (500) copies of questionnaire were distributed to the selected respondents electronically, and 403 usable surveys were filled and used for analysis. The study data was collected using purposive and convenience sampling technique. The responses were coded and analyzed using the partial least structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) using the measurement and the structural model. The model of study is specified below:

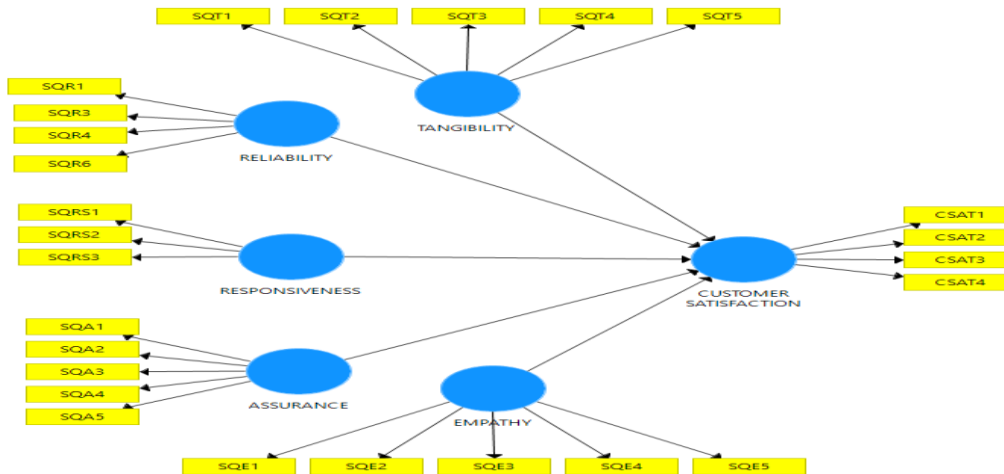


Figure 1: Theoretical Model on effect of service quality on Customer satisfaction of hotels in North Central Nigeria.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Median	Min	Max	Standard Deviation	Excess Kurtosis	Skewness
SQT	4.409	4.000	1.000	5.000	0.611	-0.624	-0.517
SQR	4.350	5.000	1.000	5.000	0.726	-0.864	-0.647
SQRS	4.749	5.000	1.000	5.000	0.494	1.517	-1.824
SQA	4.289	4.000	2.000	5.000	0.689	1.526	-0.965
SQE	4.353	5.000	2.000	5.000	0.840	1.356	-1.361
CSAT	4.279	4.000	1.000	5.000	0.845	1.587	-1.606

Source : SmartPLS output 2023

Table 4.1 above describe the study data variables in terms of the mean, median, minimum, maximum, standard deviation, kurtosis and skewness values. Tangibility shows an average value of 4.40 with a standard deviation value of 0.611, minimum and maximum value at 1 and 5. Reliability has a mean value of 4.35 with a standard deviation of 0.72, minimum and maximum values at 1 and 5. Responsiveness has a mean value of 4.74 with a standard deviation of 0.49, minimum and maximum value stood at 1 and 5. Assurance show a mean value of 4.28 with a standard deviation of 0.68, Empathy has a mean value of 4.35 with a standard deviation of 0.84, Patient Satisfaction has a mean value of 4.79 and a standard deviation of 0.84.

*The Measurement Model*

In assessing the measurement model, the item outer loadings are assessed first, and as a rule loadings above 0.70 are accepted as they indicate that the construct explains more than 50% of the indicators variance, thus providing acceptable item reliability(Hair et al 2019)

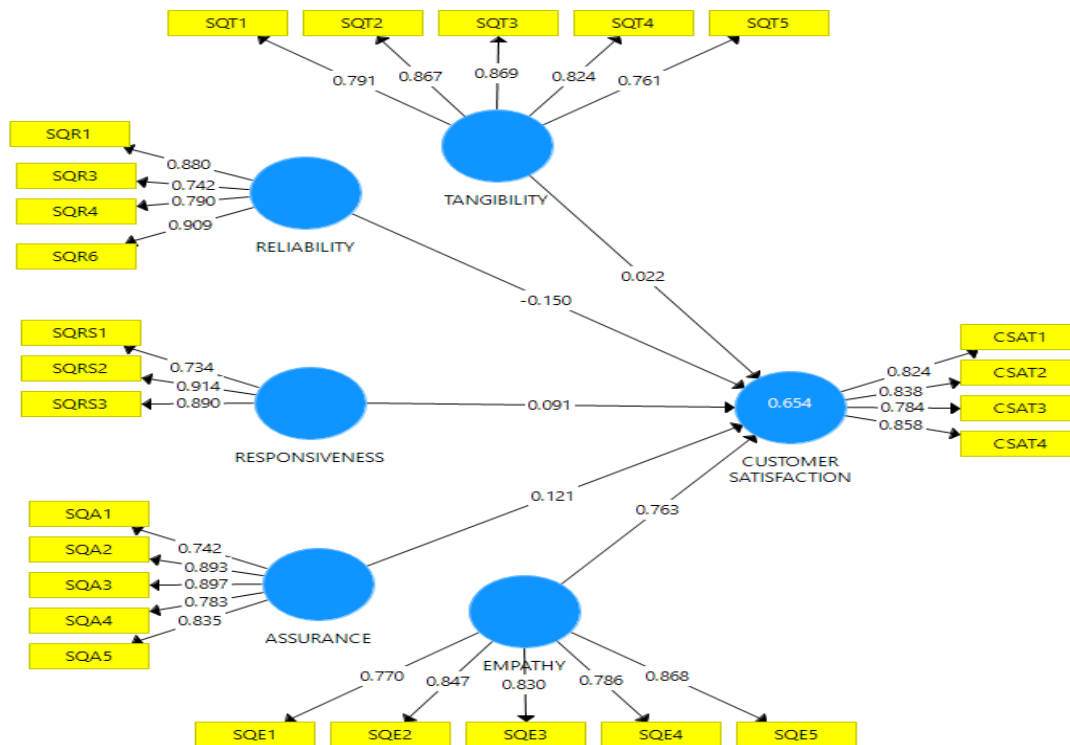


Figure 2: Indicator Outer Loadings

Table 4.2 Reliability of Study Scale

VARIABLES	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Number of Items
TANGIBILITY	SQT1 0.791 SQT2 0.867 SQT3 0.869 SQT4 0.824 SQT5 0.761	0.881	0.883	0.913	0.678	5
RELIABILITY	SQR1 0.880 SQR3 0.742 SQR4 0.790 SQR6 0.909	0.850	0.852	0.900	0.694	4
RESPONSIVE NESS	SQRS1 0.734 SQRS2 0.914 SQRS3 0.890	0.802	0.809	0.885	0.722	3
ASSURANCE	SQA1 0.742 SQA2 0.893 SQA3 0.897 SQA4 0.783 SQA5 0.835	0.888	0.904	0.918	0.693	5
EMPATHY	SQE1 0.770 SQE2 0.847 SQE3 0.830 SQE4 0.786 SQE5 0.868	0.879	0.885	0.912	0.674	5
CUSTOMER SATISFACTION	CSAT1 0.824 CSAT2 0.838 CSAT3 0.784 CSAT4 0.858	0.848	0.856	0.896	0.683	4

Source: SmartPLS Output 2023

Composite reliability was applied to test for internal consistency of the study. All the values fall within the minimum benchmark of 0.70 rating of good consistency. Cronbach alpha are above 0.70 which is the minimum accepted value as posited by Hair et al (2019). The average variance extracted (AVE) was used to test for convergent validity, All the variables showed values above 0.50 which indicates that the construct explains at least 50 percent of the variance of its items. The variance inflation factor (VIF) was used to test the collinearity of the formative indicators, all the values were less than 5, this indicates the absence of critical collinearity issues among the formative indicators measured constructs.

**Table 4.3: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) of the correlation**

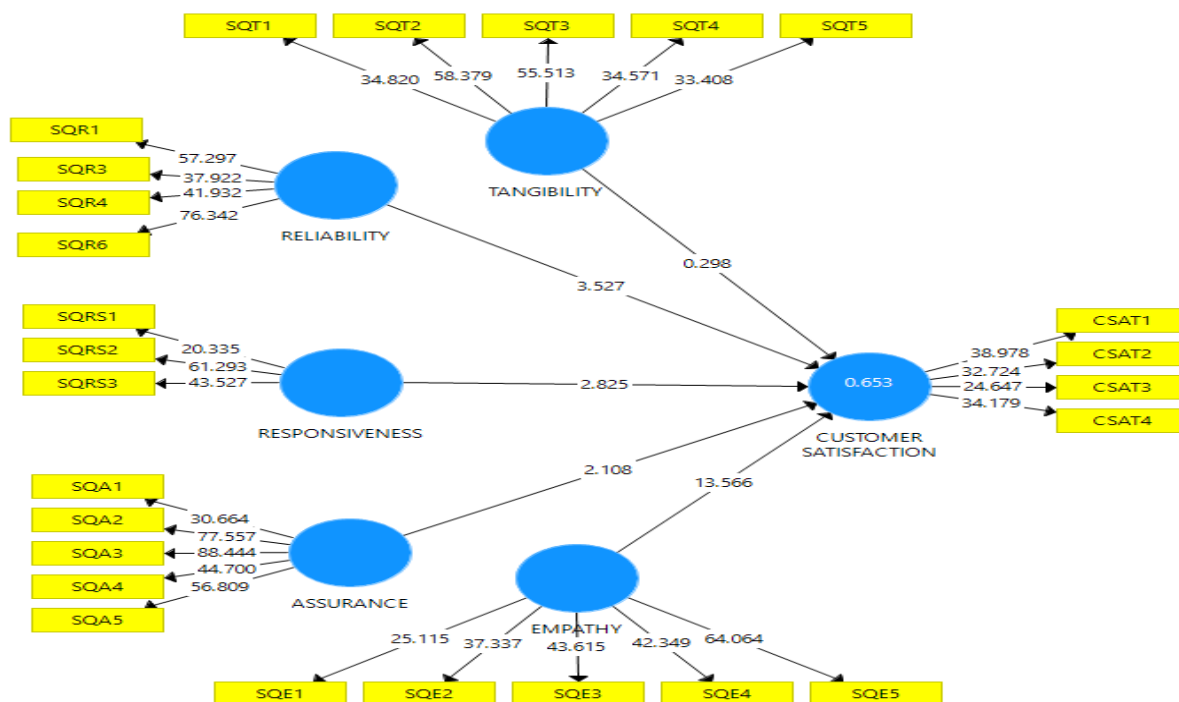
	ASSU	EMP	CSAT	REL	RES	TAN
<b>ASSURANCE</b>						
<b>EMPATHY</b>	0.882					
<b>CUSTOMER SATISFACTION</b>	<b>0.729</b>	0.893				
<b>RELIABILITY</b>	<b>0.775</b>	<b>0.817</b>	<b>0.584</b>			
<b>RESPONSIVENESS</b>	<b>0.251</b>	<b>0.407</b>	<b>0.401</b>	<b>0.391</b>		
<b>TANGIBILITY</b>	<b>0.816</b>	<b>0.703</b>	<b>0.589</b>	<b>0.725</b>	<b>0.457</b>	

Source: SmartPLS Output 2023

The Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) of the correlation is the mean value of the item correlation across construct relating to the (geometric) mean of the average correlations for the items measuring the same construct (Voorhees et al 2016). According to Henseler et al (2015) discriminant validity problems are present when Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio values are greater than 0.90. The HTMT values are less than 0.90, this indicate that there is no discriminant validity problem.

*The Structural Model*

In assessing the structural model, the standard assessment criteria was consider which include the path coefficient,t-values, p-values, and coefficient of determination(R<sup>2</sup>).the bootstrapping procedure was conducted using a resample of 5000





**Figure 3: Path coefficient of the Regression Model**

The R-square value stood at 0.653 indicating that variation in customer satisfaction is explained by service quality dimensions of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy to the degree of 65%, the remaining 35% variation could be explained by other factors. The result of the path coefficient analysis is presented in the table below: -

**Table 4.4 Path Coefficient**

Hypotheses	Variables	Path Coefficient (Beta)	T- Values	P Values	Decision
Ho <sub>1</sub>	TANGIBILITY	-0.065	1.996	0.038	Rejected
Ho <sub>2</sub>	RELIABILITY	0.149	3.459	0.001	Rejected
Ho <sub>3</sub>	RESPONSIVENESS	0.092	2.872	0.004	Rejected
Ho <sub>4</sub>	ASSURANCE	0.122	2.147	0.032	Rejected
Ho <sub>5</sub>	EMPATHY -	0.763	13.540	0.000	Rejected

Source : SmartPLS Output 2023

**Test of Hypotheses**

The result from the analysis shows that tangibility has a significant effect on customer satisfaction of hotels in North central Nigeria. The decision was reach based on the t-value of 1.996 which is greater than 1.96 and a p- value of 0.038 which is greater than 0.05 of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis which state that tangibility has no significant effect on customer satisfaction of hotels in north central Nigeria is rejected. The result also indicates that reliability has a significant effect on customer satisfaction of hotels in north central Nigeria with a t-value of 3.469 and a p-value of 0.001. Responsiveness indicates a significant effect on customer satisfaction of hotels with a t-value 2.827 with a p-value of 0.004. Similarly, the analysis indicate that assurance has a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction of hotels with a t-value of 2.147 with a p-value of 0.032. Empathy also shows a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction with a t-value of 13.540 with a p-value of 0.000. thus, implying that the null hypotheses lack sufficient ground to be accepted as such the alternative hypotheses which state that responsiveness, assurance and empathy has a significant effect on customer satisfaction of hotels in North central Nigeria is accepted.

**Discussions of Findings**

The study result reveal that tangibility has a negative and significant effect on customer satisfaction of in north central Nigeria. This implies that hotels lack the require equipment and facilities, and when there is a deficiency in physical facilities and equipment, it can contribute to lower customer satisfaction scores as reveal by the study. These findings disagree with that of Junaid et al (2018,) Han et al (2019) who found a positive and significant effect of tangibility on customer satisfaction. The study findings also reveal that reliability has a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction of hotel in north central Nigeria. This implies that customers in north-central Nigeria place great importance on consistent and dependable service delivery. Hotel managers should prioritize efforts to enhance reliability, ensuring that services are delivered as promised and that staff are well-trained and competent., while responsiveness, assurance and empathy also show a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction of hotel in North central Nigeria. These findings agree with Onyishi et al (2018), Sharma (2022), Waseen et al (2018).

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

The research findings on the effect of service quality on customer satisfaction in hotels in north-central Nigeria provide valuable insights into the relationship between various dimensions of SERVQUAL and customer satisfaction. The study reveals both positive and negative effect of different SERVQUAL

dimensions on customer satisfaction. Firstly, the findings indicate a negative and significant effect of SERVQUAL tangibility on customer satisfaction. This suggests that when there is a deficiency in physical facilities and equipment, it can contribute to lower customer satisfaction and this has led to switching of hotels by customers. Secondly, the study reveals a significant effect of SERVQUAL reliability on customer satisfaction. This implies that customers in north-central Nigeria place great importance on consistent and dependable service delivery. Thirdly, the findings indicate a positive and significant effect of SERVQUAL responsiveness on customer satisfaction. This emphasizes the importance of prompt and efficient service delivery in hotels. Regular training and clear communication channels can help improve responsiveness. Fourthly, the study reveals a positive and significant effect of SERVQUAL assurance on customer satisfaction. This highlights the significance of creating a sense of trust and confidence in the hotel's services. Lastly, the findings indicate a positive and significant effect of SERVQUAL empathy on customer satisfaction. This suggests that customers in north-central Nigeria value personalized and empathetic interactions with hotel staff. Based on the research findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Hotel managers should focus on maintaining a pleasant and well-maintained physical environment, implement technology solutions by exploring the use of technology to streamline service processes, improve efficiency, and enhance the overall guest experience.
2. Enhance reliability by investing in staff training and development programs to ensure consistent service delivery. Regularly assess and monitor service quality to identify areas for improvement and address any issues promptly.
3. Improve responsiveness by establish efficient systems and processes to facilitate prompt responses to customer inquiries, requests, and complaints. Empower employees to make decisions and take appropriate actions to resolve issues in a timely manner.
4. Foster assurance by building trust and credibility with customers by providing accurate and transparent information about the hotel's services and amenities. Ensure that the hotel's facilities and infrastructure are well-maintained and meet the expectations of guests. Train staff to demonstrate professionalism and competence, and provide them with the necessary resources and support to deliver high-quality service.
5. Promote empathy by training hotel staff to empathize with guests and understand their individual needs and preferences. Encourage employees to go the extra mile in providing personalized attention and care. Implement feedback systems to gather guest opinions and suggestions, and use this feedback to continuously improve the level of service provided.

By implementing these recommendations, hotels in north-central Nigeria can enhance their service quality and, in turn, improve customer satisfaction levels. Satisfied customers are more likely to become repeat guests and recommend the hotel to others, leading to increased revenue and a positive reputation in the hospitality industry.

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