

**SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION OF FIVE STAR HOTELS IN
PORTHARCOURT, RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA**

Damian- Okoro, Inetimi Roseline (PhD) & Kenneth, C. Adiele (PhD)
Department of Marketing, Faculty of Administration and Management
Rivers State University Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Email: roseline.damian-okoro@ust.edu.ng, adiele.kenneth@ust.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between service quality and satisfaction of customers of 5-star hotels in Port Harcourt. The objectives of the study were to ascertain the extent to which service quality relates with loyalty and retention of customers of 5-star hotels in Port Harcourt. Customer loyalty and retention are measures of customer satisfaction. Based on these variables, two null hypotheses were tested in order to achieve the objectives and purpose of this study. The population of this study comprised customers of 5-star hotels in Port Harcourt. However, a sample size of 417 customers was drawn from the population who constituted the respondents of the study. A semi-structured questionnaire designed in Likert five-point scale ranging from very low extent to very high extent was used to collect data from the target respondents. Reliability and validity of the research questionnaire was determined through Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test and Exploratory Factor Analysis respectively. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the two null hypotheses with a critical value of 0.01, and the hypotheses were tested with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 24.0. Results of the hypotheses indicated that service quality relates positively and significantly with loyalty and retention of customers of 5-star hotels in Port Harcourt. Based on these findings the study concluded that there is a significant and positive relationship between service quality and satisfaction of customers of 5-star hotels in Port Harcourt. Therefore, the authors recommended that 5-star hotels in Port Harcourt should improve the quality of their services in order to satisfy their customers and get them retained and loyal to their organizations.

Keywords: service quality, customer loyalty, customer retention, 5-star hotels.

INTRODUCTION

5-star hotels have become preferred brands among tourists, business travelers and residents of Rivers State, Nigeria who seek hotel services, due to the soothing facilities and services they provide (Igwe & Ateke, 2021). This however, requires 5-star hotels to continually seek innovative solutions to improve value delivery, and to gain customer loyalty, maintain competitive advantage and avoid elimination from the hospitality industry. Haneef et al. (2012) opined that lack of customer satisfaction in the hotel industry if not properly checked, might result in huge losses to hotels and their customers, as well as loss of public confidence in the hotels (Ohando, 2015). Service organizations can differentiate themselves by delivering services of higher quality than their competitors. Poor service quality disappoints customers, erodes their satisfaction and negatively affects organizations' performance (Bodet, 2018). Evaluating service quality is a very complex process, because of the intangible nature of service and the difficulty in measuring customer's expectations and perceptions.

Zeithaml and Bitner (2016) stated that content and delivery of a service are essential factors for evaluating service quality. While customers evaluate the quality of delivery, service providers determine the content of the service. Edvardsson (2012) contends that the concept of service should be approached from the customer's perspective. Because the customer's total perception of

the outcome is the "service" is created in a process where service is generated. Customer's involvement in the service process is necessary, since they are co-producer of service (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2016).

Thus, hotel service providers need to understand customer's service requirements and how it impact on service delivery and customer's attitudes (Edvardsson, 2012), for a small increase of customer satisfaction can lead to customer loyalty and retention as revealed in several studies carried out in the area of service quality including Hamilton-Ibama and Ihunwo (2022) who investigated service quality and customer retention in deposit money banks in Port Harcourt. Similarly, Pakurar et al. (2019) investigated service quality dimensions that affect customer satisfaction in Jordanian banking sector. Ramya, Kowsalya and Dharanipriya (2019) also carried out a study on service quality and its dimensions. However, to the best of our knowledge, previous studies on similar constructs did not identify existing relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in the context of 5-Star Hotels in Port Harcourt. Against this backdrop this paper is designed to investigate the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction of 5-Star Hotels in Port Harcourt. The study is conceptualized in a framework, and underpinned by expectancy disconfirmation theory.

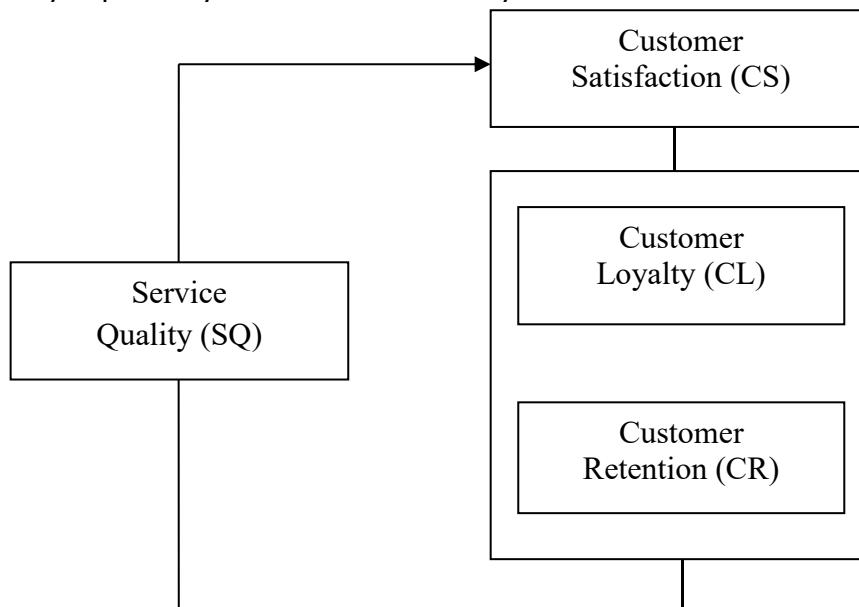


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the relationship between service quality and customer Satisfaction of 5 Star Hotels in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Source: Author's Conceptualization from the review of related Literature, 2025

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundation: Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory

The expectancy disconfirmation theory was originally developed by Oliver (1980). The Expectancy disconfirmation theorists consider performance, affect, and equity as the determinants of customer satisfaction and repurchase intention (Oliver & Swan, 1989; Oliver, 1993). According to the theory, consumers' repurchase intentions are determined primarily by satisfaction. The theory demonstrates how customer satisfaction is affected by the combination of the performance of the good/service and the customer's level of expectation.

The theory posits that in cases where the performance that a customer perceives is deemed to be greater than the expectations held, satisfaction will increase. This is defined as positive

disconfirmation. In contrast, a perceived performance which is lower than the customer's level of expectation will result in a decrease in satisfaction; and this is negative disconfirmation (Anderson, Fornell & Lehmann, 1994). Therefore, satisfaction is a function of the difference between performance and expectations. Thus, performance - expectations = satisfaction. The disconfirmation model indicates a negative relationship between expectations and satisfaction; it predicts that as expectations increase, satisfaction will decrease. These expectations held are recognized as a standard against which performance information is evaluated. In view of the propositions of the expectancy disconfirmation theory, it was considered appropriate to form the basis of this study because the satisfaction of customers is determined by the perceived quality of the services provided by the hotels.

Concept of Service Quality

Quality is an association of two different words; 'service' and quality. Service means "any activity or benefit that one party can offer to another that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything (Ramya et al., 2019). Grönroos (2003) describes services as consisting of series of more or less intangible activities that normally, but not necessarily always, take place in interaction between the customer and service employee and/or physical resources or goods and/or systems of the service provider, which are provided as solutions to customer problems. Broadly speaking, services include all economic activities whose outputs are not physical products or construction and are generally consumed at the time they are produced and provide added value in forms that are essentially intangible concerns of their first purchaser (George & Kumar, 2014).

Furthermore, Kotler et al. (1999) pointed out that a service is any activity or benefit that one party offers to another which is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything. Its product may or may not be tied to physical product. According to the scholars services have a number of unique characteristics that make them so different from other products that are already in the market. Some of the most commonly accepted characteristics are intangible, inseparable, heterogeneity, perishability and ownership.

In today's highly competitive business environment, service has increasingly played a critical role in hotel business operations. Thus, service quality is recognized as a strategic tool for attaining operational efficiency and better performance of business. In the service sector 'quality' is an important element for the success of business. Service quality according to Bitner et al. (1994) is the consumer's overall impression of the relative inferiority or superiority of the organization and its services. From this definition, service quality is said to be a key to the survival of all servicing companies. Adding to this, Parasuraman, Zeithami and Berry (1988) affirmed that service quality is a function of the differences between expectation and performance along the quality dimension. Customer expectations are beliefs about a service that serve as standards against which service performance is judged. As customers become well educated, they demand new products, better and more reliable delivery, as well as more responsive services.

Consequently, to improve competitiveness, hotels have to understand customer needs and expectations (Parasuraman et al., 1988) and satisfy their customers by providing better products and services. Quality service sustains the customers' confidence in service providers' delivery of the service, attract more and new customers, increase business with existing clients, reduce dissatisfied customers with fewer mistakes, maximize a company's profits and increase customer satisfaction.

Concept of Customer Satisfaction

Satisfaction is the degree to which a product's perceived performance is in line with a buyer's expectations (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008). Earlier, Oliver and Swan (1989) define customer satisfaction as consumer's personal assessment or accumulation of knowledge gathered from using a product. Additionally, Oliver (1997) describes satisfaction as an evaluative judgment made after making purposive decision on a product. Similar to Kotler and Armstrong's definition, Smith (2007) describes customer satisfaction as the measures of the way firms' product matches or exceeds customer expectation. Considering the importance of customer satisfaction, Drucker (1954) asserts that the principal aim of running a business is to create a satisfied customer.

In recent times there is a fundamental change in the concept of marketing in which marketing has moved from creating transactional exchange to creating and maintaining relational exchange, and as a consequence of this fundamental change customer satisfaction has gained a renewed attention (Grönroos, 1994). Kotler and Armstrong (2008) observed that "smart companies aim to delight customers by promising only what they can deliver, then delivering more than they promise. Delighted customers not only make repeat purchases, they become customer evangelists who tell others about their good experiences with the product" while those who are not satisfied with the product's performance will disparage the product to their acquaintances.

There are wide ranges of products that consumers usually face to choose from (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008) in order to satisfy a given consumer need, and so when they decide to choose one from among the numerous competing brands they expect a certain level of performance or value that should be provided by the product which influences their judgment as to whether their experience with the product is pleasant or not. Thus, "customer satisfaction depends on the product's perceived performance relative to a buyer's expectations. If the product's performance falls short of expectations, the customer is dissatisfied. If performance matches expectations, the customer is satisfied. If performance exceeds expectations, the customer is highly satisfied or delighted" (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008).

Satisfaction, according to Kotler, Armstrong and Cunningham (2002) is an important factor that determines positive word-of-mouth, consumer loyalty and repurchases. Thus, making strategic efforts to enhance customer satisfaction is an indication to show that firms are determined to make profits and remain in business for a long period of time. Kotler and Armstrong (2008) observe that when customers are highly satisfied they become loyal, which in turn results in better company performance. Earlier, Smith (2007) echoed that customer satisfaction is a strong predictor of customer loyalty, retention and repurchase and its measures are psychological basically cognitive, and affective, which are critical to any firm. In contrast, Oliva, Oliver and Lan (1995) state that there is a nonlinear and an asymmetrical relationship between customer satisfaction and repurchase intention, which means there is no direct relationship between customer satisfaction and repurchase intentions. In this study the authors investigated how service quality relates with customer loyalty and retention among the myriads of customer satisfaction measures as discussed in the preceding section.

Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is a factor that encourages consumers to shop more consistently (Magatef & Tomalieh, 2015). Loyalty is the result of developing past positive experiences with the customers and having them return to the company various times due to these experiences hence customers will return again and again to do business with the company regardless of whether it may not have the best product, price or service delivery (Magatef & Tomalieh, 2015). Loyalty is generally explained in terms of attitude and behaviour (Uncles, Dowling & Hammond, 2003).

Customer loyalty is developed over a period of time from a consistent record of meeting, and sometimes even exceeding customer expectations (Bagshaw & Tarurhor, 2018). According to Bloemer and Kasper (2015), customer loyalty refers to as genuine loyalty rather than future purchase behaviour, which is the true repurchase of a product or service. Bloemer and Kasper (2015) view customer loyalty as a multi-faceted concept and it includes both positive and negative reactions. Narteh, Agbembiese, Kodua, and Braimah (2013) revealed that the customers may express their loyalty in diverse conducts such as continuous purchase from the same service provider without any emotional connection, increasing the amount and frequency of buying behaviour or both, or becoming supporters and defenders of the organization or a brand for other consumers and influence their purchasing decision.

Customer loyalty is considered an advantage for many reasons including the probability that loyal customers give priority to their company and will give positive feedback of the firm to other people. Loyal customers tend not to be overtly price-sensitive and the costs of serving customers are less (Dowling and Uncles, 2011). Loyalty programs also help in annual increments of purchase to a firm for a substantial proportion of customers (Bloemer & Kasper, 2015). Loyalty programs are special efforts designed to make the customer stick to a brand for a long time (Evanschitzky & Wunderlich, 2016).

Customer Retention

Customer retention is the propensity of the customer to stay with a service provider (Ranaweera & Neely, 2003). Customer retention is the commitment by an individual to remain in exchange relationship with an organization that provides goods and services to the individual. It can also be defined as maintaining long-term exchange relationship with existing subscribers and preventing them from going to a competitor. The concept of retention has been defined by several authors.

The concept of customer retention is something that may be exhibited by customers towards a product, brand, an activity, or a firm. According to Zineldin (2000), customer retention is a commitment to maintain business transaction or exchange with a particular firm in an ongoing basis. Additionally, Boohene, Agyapong and Gonu (2013) describe customer retention as a long-term commitment on the part of the customer and the firm to maintain relationship. Buttle (2004) noted that customer retention is concerned with repeat patronage and it is closely related with repeat-purchase and brand loyalty.

Retention is often used interchangeably with loyalty in literature (Boohene et al, 2013) however Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1996) noted that customer retention has been seen as a measure of customer loyalty. But, anyhow customer retention is conceptualized; its significance is anchored on its ability to determine of firm's profitability, growth, and long-term survival (Didia & Harry, 2019). Boohene et al. (2013) posit that customer retention has direct effect on the customer's lifetime value, which is a more profitable avenue for firms to pursue growth and long time survival (Didia & Harry, 2019).

Considering this intense competition resulting in low customer acquisition rate is slow, firms are under constant pressure to retain customers (Boohene et al, 2013). Additionally, it has been validated by Reichheld and Sasser (2010) that it is five times more expensive to acquire a new customer than to maintain an existing one. Consequently, it is more very important to commit organizational resources on maintaining existing customers than acquiring new ones.

Empirical Review on the relationship between Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

Several scholars have conducted investigations into the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. For example, Nsiah and Asantewaah (2014) investigated the relationship between service quality and customer retention in the context of Ghana banking industry. The study adopted Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Multiple Regression to analyze the data and found a very strong, positive and significant relationship between service quality and all the measures of customer retention which are customer commitment and loyalty. Similarly, Venetis and Ghauri (2014) conducted a study on service quality and customer retention. Unlike our study the scholars adopted correlation analysis and found that a strong positive exists between service quality long-term relationships as well as customer retention.

Again, Neena (2018) used regression analysis to measure the relationship between service quality and customer retention in their study to investigate the role of service quality on customer retention. The result showed that there is a moderate, positive relationship between the variables; which is in line with the findings of our study. Also, the result of the study conducted by Winnie (2016) adopted regression analysis was used to measure the "relationship between service quality and customer retention; and it was found that there is a significant relationship between SERVQUAL dimensions (reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness) and indicators of customer retention (customer trust, customer satisfaction, level of involvement, communication effectiveness, switching barriers and price).

Also, Ana and João (2013) investigated service quality and customer satisfaction through five key dimensions: Staff Service, Reception Service, Bar & Restaurant Service, Room Quality and Safety; a structural model was built to test the relations between Service Quality components, Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty; results demonstrated that the effect of Service quality on Loyalty was mediated by Customer satisfaction which was a strong determinant of Loyalty; structural model shows that service quality is a strong determinant of hotel guests' loyalty mediated by the guests' satisfaction.

In contrast, Jayaraman and Shankar (2017) conducted a quantitative research to investigate the relationship between service quality dimensions and customer satisfaction Malaysia. Regression analysis was used to measure the relationship between the variables. The analysis revealed that assurance has positive relationship but it has no significant effect on customer satisfaction; reliability has negative relationship but it has no significant effect on customer satisfaction; tangibles have positive relationship and have significant impact on customer satisfaction; empathy has positive relationship but it has no significant effect on customer satisfaction; responsiveness has positive relationship but no significant impact on customer satisfaction.

In this regard, Lo et al (2010) investigated the impact of service quality on customer loyalty of banks in Penang, Malaysia. Regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses stated in the study. The findings show that improvement in service quality can enhance customer loyalty. However, the service quality dimensions that play a significant role in this equation are reliability, empathy, and assurance, and that tangibles have no significant impact on customer loyalty.

In contrast, Girishn (2016) investigated the impact of service quality on business performance in hospitality industries. Data were collected through the tourists of ten 5-star hotels in Qatar using the simple random sampling technique, and regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses in the study. Findings confirmed the significant interrelationship of tangibles, reliability and empathy with financial, non-financial, and operational performance of the hospitality industry.

Responsiveness and assurance had significant interrelationship with non-financial performance and operational performance respectively.

Similarly, Iddrisua, Noonib, Fiankoc & Mensahd (2015) carried out a study assessing the impact of service quality on customer loyalty of the cellular industry of Ghana. Survey questionnaire was used to collect 311 data from mobile users who are subscribers of 5 of the major cellular firms in Accra Metropolis of Ghana. The data was analyzed using correlation and multiple regression analysis. The findings revealed that service quality variables such as Tangibles, Responsiveness, Reliability, Assurance and Empathy have a positive influence on customer loyalty through customer satisfaction. The result further revealed customer satisfaction has a direct relationship with customer loyalty. Sequel to the findings obtained from empirical literature and also based on the results obtained by previous researchers, the authors hypothesize as thus:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between service quality and loyalty of customers of 5-star hotels in Port Harcourt.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between service quality and retention of customers of 5-star hotels in Port Harcourt.

Study Methodology

The cross-sectional survey research design was adopted to investigate the relationship between service quality and satisfaction 5-star hotels in Port Harcourt. The methodology was rooted in positivist research philosophy which used mathematical techniques in investigating a phenomena. The population of this study comprised customers of 5-star hotels in Port Harcourt. The population is large and flowing so an estimated sample size of 417 was drawn from which primary data were collected and analyzed to establish the relationships between the variables. A semi-structured questionnaire designed in Likert five-point scale ranging from very low extent to very high extent was used to collect data from the target respondents. Reliability of the research instrument was determined through Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test with a threshold of 0.70 set by Nunally (1978). Similarly, validity of the study questionnaire was determined through Exploratory Factor Analysis. All the analyses were done with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 22.0.

Table 1: Reliability and Validity Tests

S/N	Variables	Number of Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients
1	Service Quality	5	0.678	0.757
2	Customer Loyalty	5	0.831	0.784
3	Customer Retention	5	0.747	0.884

Source: SPSS Output form field data

Table 1 shows results of the reliability and validity analyses. As shown in the Table, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients are all greater than 0.70 indicating that the results of this investigation are reliable. Similarly, the factor loadings for the validity test are greater than 0.4 which means the items in the research instrument measured what they were supposed to measure.

TEST OF RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Test of Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between service quality and loyalty of customers of 5-star hotels in Port Harcourt

Table 2: Correlation Analysis of the relationship between service quality and loyalty of customers of 5-star hotels in Port Harcourt

		Service Quality	Customer Loyalty
Service Quality	Pearson Correlation	1	.579**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	417	417
Customer Loyalty	Pearson Correlation	.579**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	417	417

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

Source: SPSS output from survey

A Pearson Product Moment Correlation was run to assess the relationship between service quality and loyalty of customers of 5-star hotels in Port Harcourt. The strength and direction of the relationship between the predictor and criterion variables are indicated by the Pearson Correlation Coefficient of 0.579. Using a sample of 417 registered 5-star hotel consumers as respondents, results of the analysis in Table 2 showed that, service quality has a moderate and positive relationship with loyalty. Furthermore, significance of the relationship is shown by the probability value of 0.000 which is less than the critical value (0.01), indicating that the relationship of the predictor variable and criterion variable is statistically significant. In other words, service quality has a moderate, positive and statistically significant relationship with loyalty ($r = 0.579$, $N = 417$, $p = 0.000 < 0.01$). In view of this result, the Authors rejects the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between service quality and loyalty of customers of 5-star hotels in Port Harcourt.

Test of Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between service quality and retention of customer of 5-star hotels in Port Harcourt

Table 3: Correlation Analysis of the relationship between service quality and retention of customer of 5-star hotels in Port Harcourt

		Service Quality	Customer Retention
Service Quality	Pearson Correlation	1	.765**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	417	417
Customer Retention	Pearson Correlation	.765**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	417	417

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

Source: SPSS output from survey

A Pearson Product Moment Correlation was run to assess the relationship between service quality and retention of customer of 5-star hotels in Port Harcourt. The strength and direction of the relationship between the predictor and criterion variables are indicated by the Pearson Correlation Coefficient of 0.765. Using a sample of 417 registered 5-star hotel consumers as respondents, results of the analysis in Table 3 showed that, service quality has a strong and positive relationship with customer retention. Furthermore, significance of the relationship is shown by the probability value of 0.000 which is less than the critical value (0.01), indicating that the relationship between the predictor and criterion variables is significant. In other words, service quality has a strong, positive and significant relationship with customer retention ($r = 0.765$, $N = 417$, $p = 0.000 < 0.01$). In view of this result, the researcher rejects the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between service quality and retention of customer of 5-star hotels in Port Harcourt.

Discussion of Findings

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis was adopted to assess the relationship between service quality and loyalty in of customers of 5-star hotels in Port Harcourt. The result showed that, service quality has a strong, positive and significant relationship with loyalty. Hence, the authors rejected the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between service quality and loyalty of 5-star hotels in Port Harcourt.

Additionally, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to assess the relationship between service quality and retention of customers of 5-star hotels in Port Harcourt showed that, service quality has a moderate, positive and significant relationship with retention. In view of this result, the authors rejected the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between service quality and retention of customers of 5-star hotels in Port Harcourt.

Findings of this study are in line with findings of previous studies examined. Particularly, the findings agree with the findings of Nsiah and Asantewaah (2014) who investigated the relationship between service quality and customer retention in the context of Ghana banking industry. Similarly, the findings align with the findings of Venetis and Ghauri (2014) who conducted a study on service quality and customer retention. Again, Neena (2018) used regression analysis to measure the relationship between service quality and customer retention in their study to investigate the role of service quality on customer retention. The result showed that there is a moderate, positive relationship between the variables; which is in line with the findings of our study.

Also, the result of the study conducted by Winnie (2016) adopted regression analysis was used to measure the "relationship between service quality and customer retention; and it was found that there is a significant relationship between SERVQUAL dimensions (reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness) and indicators of customer retention (customer trust, customer satisfaction, level of involvement, communication effectiveness, switching barriers and price). Furthermore, Iddrisua et al. (2015) carried out a study assessing the impact of service quality on customer loyalty of the cellular industry of Ghana. The findings revealed that service quality variables such as tangibles, responsiveness, reliability, assurance and empathy have a positive influence on customer loyalty through customer satisfaction.

However, the findings of this study contrast with the findings of Jayaraman and Shankar (2017) who conducted a quantitative research to investigate the relationship between service quality dimensions and customer satisfaction in Malaysia. The investigation revealed that assurance has positive relationship but it has no significant effect on customer satisfaction; reliability has negative relationship but it has no significant effect on customer satisfaction; tangibles have

positive relationship and have significant impact on customer satisfaction; empathy has positive relationship but it has no significant effect on customer satisfaction; responsiveness has positive relationship but no significant impact on customer satisfaction. Additionally, Lo et al. (2010) investigated the impact of service quality on customer loyalty of banks in Penang, Malaysia. The findings show that tangibles have no significant impact on customer loyalty.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings of the study indicated that service quality relates positively and significantly with loyalty and retention of customers of 5-star hotels in Port Harcourt. Based on these findings and the large extent to which the findings support the findings of most previous studies examined, the study concluded that there is a significant and positive relationship between service quality and satisfaction of customers of 5-star hotels in Port Harcourt. In view of the conclusion drawn from findings of the study, the authors recommended that 5-star hotels in Port Harcourt should improve the quality of their services in order to satisfy their customers and get them retained and loyal to their organizations.

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