

## Customer Feedback and Service Quality in the Akwa Ibom State Hospitality Sector

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study looks into the dynamic link that exists between service quality and customer feedback in the developing Nigerian state of Akwa Ibom. The study attempts to clarify the critical role that customer feedback plays in establishing service standards and is based on the growing importance of service quality in today's global hospitality market. By means of an exhaustive analysis of several aspects of customer feedback, including online reviews, referral rates, repeat customer behaviour, and complaint frequency, the research aims to identify their respective influences on the perceived quality of service. This study's theoretical foundations include Oliver's Expectation-Confirmation Theory and the SERVQUAL model. In the end, these frameworks impact customers' views of service quality by providing a theoretical basis to understand the intricate relationship between their experiences, expectations, and satisfaction levels. The present inquiry is grounded in empirical research from a variety of hospitality environments, which demonstrates the significance of customer feedback and its complex influence on service quality. One hundred customers who have used hospitality services in Akwa Ibom State are the subjects of this study, which employs a survey research design. Analyzing the data through regression analysis yields some interesting results. Greater complaint frequency and some elements of online evaluations show negative correlations; however higher recommendation rates are positively correlated with perceived service quality. It is noteworthy that the perception of service quality is not much affected by the behaviour of repeat customers. The results of this study have important ramifications for the hospitality industry in Akwa Ibom. These include the necessity of efficient complaint handling procedures, proactive tactics to encourage positive word-of-mouth, and a sensible use of online reviews. In order to connect service delivery with changing consumer demands and promote sustainable growth and development within the local hospitality industry, it proposes a paradigm change towards continuous improvement, tailored experiences, and proactive response tactics.*

**KEY WORDS:** online reviews, recommendation rates, repeat customer behaviour, complaint frequency, service quality.

## INTRODUCTION

In the modern global hospitality industry, service quality is critical. The hospitality industry is currently very important since they are seen as a vital source of revenue for the nation, as a result, many governments are making effort to draw travellers and visitors to their locations so they can develop and improve the quality of life in their country (Gardi et al. 2020). Due to their ability to meet the most basic requirement of visitors, which is lodging, hotels are seen as a crucial component of the tourist industry (Prabhu et al., 2020). Furthermore, visitors can take advantage of other hotel amenities, such as the restaurant, bar and swimming pool, in addition to the accommodation.

Situated in the centre of Nigeria, the Akwa Ibom State is becoming more and more acknowledged as a growing centre for tourism and hospitality. It has gained popularity as a tourism destination for both local and foreign visitors because of its alluring natural beauty, rich culture legacy, and variety of attractions. In the Akwa Ibom hospitality industry's quest for recognition, the dynamics of client feedback and its deep impact on service quality have gained significance. Hotel services are perceived as a more experience-based service sector. Hoteliers must give their guests unforgettable experiences in order to maintain a positive reputation with current and potential customers. Selling services alone is insufficient to set them apart from the competition. This is due to the fact that via their many interactions with the service provider, customers form attitudes that may reflect their rational, emotional, physical, and sensory involvement with the service offerings Kandampully, Zhang, and Jaakkola (2018). Hotels are also regarded as a crucial component of the tourism sector since they meet the most basic requirement of visitors, which is lodging Prabhu et al. (2020)

The purpose of this seminar paper is to investigate the crucial relationship between customer feedback and service quality in the particular setting of the Akwa Ibom hospitality industry. As the tourism industry expands and changes to satisfy the ever changing needs of travellers, it is critical to acknowledge the critical role that customer input plays in determining the calibre of experiences and service offered.

The ability of businesses to continuously meet or beyond client expectations is what determines service quality, which is a crucial aspect of the hospitality industry. It is crucial to comprehend and act upon customer feedback in the context of Akwa Ibom's growing tourist sector, which attracts visitors from all backgrounds. The sector's growth and success will be largely dependent on its capacity to satisfy a wide range of preferences and guarantee guest pleasure. This paper aims to clarify the importance of gathering, examining, and acting upon client feedback in the Akwa Ibom hospitality sector. It will explore how customer satisfaction, loyalty, and Akwa Ibom's overall reputation as a tourism destination are affected by service quality. Through an exploration of this vital subject, our goal is to provide actionable insights and strategies that can empower local hospitality businesses to enhance their service quality and contribute to the economic and cultural development of Akwa Ibom.

The main objective of the study is to investigate the interplay between customer feedback and the quality of service provided in the hospitality industry of Akwa Ibom State.

The specific objectives of the study are:

- i. Analyze the sentiment and content of online reviews in the Akwa Ibom State hospitality sector, discerning specific aspects influencing perceived service quality
- ii. Investigate the impact of customer recommendation rates on the perceived service quality of hospitality establishments in Akwa Ibom State, identifying key factors driving positive endorsements.
- iii. Examine the correlation between perceived service quality and the likelihood of customers returning to the same establishments in Akwa Ibom State.
- iv. Analyze the effect of complaint frequency on the overall perceived service quality of hospitality establishments in Akwa Ibom State, discerning patterns and areas requiring improvement based on customer feedback.

### **Research hypotheses**

How do the sentiments in online reviews correlate with the perceived service quality in the Akwa Ibom State hospitality sector?

**H<sub>1</sub>:** The content and sentiments of online reviews significantly impact the perceived service quality in the Akwa Ibom State hospitality sector.

**H<sub>0</sub>:** The content and sentiments of online reviews do not significantly impact the perceived service quality in the Akwa Ibom State hospitality sector.

How do customer recommendation rates align with and influence the perceived service quality of hospitality establishments in Akwa Ibom State?

**H<sub>1</sub>:** High customer recommendation rates significantly correlate with better perceived service quality in hospitality establishments across Akwa Ibom State.

**H<sub>0</sub>:** Customer recommendation rates do not significantly correlate with perceived service quality in hospitality establishments across Akwa Ibom State.

How does the likelihood of customer return correlate with their perceptions of service quality?

**H<sub>1</sub>:** The likelihood of customers returning to the same hospitality establishments in Akwa Ibom State is significantly influenced by their perceptions of service quality.

**H<sub>0</sub>:** The likelihood of customers returning to the same hospitality establishments in Akwa Ibom State is not significantly influenced by their perceptions of service quality.

How does the frequency of customer complaints impact the overall perceived service quality of hospitality establishments in Akwa Ibom State?

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Higher complaint frequency negatively impacts the overall perceived service quality of hospitality establishments in Akwa Ibom State.

**H<sub>0</sub>:** Complaint frequency does not significantly impact the overall perceived service quality of hospitality establishments in Akwa Ibom State.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Online Review**

Online reviews, which are widely accessible on Yelp and TripAdvisor, are now crucial in influencing what consumers decide to buy. Guo et al. (2020) demonstrated that positive online customer reviews increase the likelihood of purchase more than negative ones. Additionally, they discovered that purchasing decisions are significantly influenced by perceived credibility, but only in the presence of negative online customer evaluations.

### **Recommendation Rates**

Recommendation rates are still quite important in the hospitality sector. Positive recommendations have a big influence on customer decisions, whether they come from social media, internet reviews, or word-of-mouth. When selecting lodging, dining options, or travel services, customers frequently turn to referrals from friends, family, or internet resources. Prior research has demonstrated that elevated rates of recommendation have a favourable impact on consumers' evaluations of service excellence and foster brand allegiance. Positive service experiences are frequently indicated by higher recommendation rates, which further enhance the standing of hospitality venues.

### **Likelihood of Customer Return**

Customers' potential to return or make additional purchases from a specific business or establishment is known as the likelihood of customer return. This is an important facet of consumer behaviour that has a big impact on a business's earnings, viability, and performance over the long run, especially in the hotel sector. Return rates are favourably impacted by outstanding customer service, individualized attention, and promptness in attending to client demands. The importance of factors like ambience, attention to detail, and unique experiences on customers' decisions to return to boutique hotels was underlined in a study conducted by Nguyen et al. (2018).

### **Customer Complaints**

Customer complaints are a crucial component of customer feedback, giving firms insightful information about areas in need of development. Effectively managing complaints is essential to preserving client happiness, brand loyalty, and a company's general reputation—particularly in the hospitality sector. Customer complaints provide organizations with an opportunity to pinpoint areas of weakness and implement the necessary improvements, whether they are related to staff behaviour, facilities, or services. Improving customer happiness and service quality can be achieved by addressing these issues.

### **Service Quality**

The quality theory, according to Abdullah & Afshar (2019), is elusive and hazy in its definition. Because products and services have different qualities, it is crucial to distinguish between the two.

Being a process rather than an object is one of the most important and unique qualities of services. Service businesses therefore don't have any products, but they do have interactive procedures. Services are invisible, thus it's hard for the provider to explain them and for customers to quantify them (Ali et al. 2021). Since the provision of services in the hospitality sector invariably involves human interaction, attention should be focused on managing people, particularly on the interactions known as service encounters between staff and clients. The collective effect of customer-participated service encounters determines the success or failure of the hotel industry. (Abdullah, 2018)

Professionals have recently expressed remarkable concern about service quality. Examining various interpretations of service quality reveals that it is a result of the relationship that customers establish between their expectations and what they actually receive from the relevant service provider. (Anwar & Abdullah, 2021)

The degree to which a service either meets or is beyond the expectations of the client is referred to as the concept of service quality. It includes a range of factors and characteristics that go into the total assessment of a service. A number of frameworks and models have been created to analyze and quantify service quality; the SERVQUAL model is one of the most well-known of them. Understanding service quality aspects is still influenced by the SERVQUAL model, which was developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry in 1985. Despite being developed prior to 2018, this model served as a basis for later research and is still used in service quality studies.

The SERVQUAL model identifies five core dimensions of service quality:

Tangibles: The physical attributes of buildings, tools, workers, and correspondence.

Reliability: The capacity to deliver promised services precisely and consistently.

Responsiveness: The capacity and willingness to assist clients and deliver timely service.

Assurance: Employee competence, politeness, and capacity to inspire confidence and trust.

Empathy: The provision of caring, individualized attention to customers.

Delivering services that not only meet but ideally surpass client expectations across multiple dimensions is the essence of the concept of service quality. It necessitates a comprehensive strategy that takes into account both concrete and abstract elements of the customer experience, with an emphasis on ongoing enhancement and pleasure.

## **Theoretical Review**

### **SERVQUAL Model**

SERVQUAL model is a popular theoretical framework for evaluating and measuring service quality. The theory was developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry. Five essential aspects of service quality are identified by this model: tangible, which focuses on the physical aspect of the service, like the appearance of facilities, equipments and the staffs. Reliability, this dimension has to do with the ability of the service provider to deliver services correctly, dependably and consistently. Responsiveness, it measures the willingness of service providers to assist customers promptly and efficiently. Assurance has to do with the knowledge, competence, and credibility of service providers and their ability to inspire trust and confidence

in customers. Empathy, it involves providing caring, individualized attention and consideration to customers' needs and concerns.

By evaluating and comprehending consumers' views of service quality along these lines, the SERVQUAL model assists in pinpointing areas where service delivery needs to be improved. (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985)

According to client feedback, this theory can be used in the study's context to assess the level of service provided by the Akwa Ibom State hospitality industry. It facilitates the identification of particular areas that require development in order to match client perceptions and expectations.

### **Expectation-Confirmation Theory**

Expectation-Confirmation theory also called Oliver's Expectation-Confirmation Theory developed by Richard L. Oliver in 1980. The theory suggests that a customer satisfaction depends on whether their original expectations are confirmed or not. This theory can clarify how consumer feedback—such as online reviews, referral rates, and complaint frequency—serves as a gauge for whether or not expectations about the quality of the services received are met. It can be useful in comprehending how customer feedback affects opinions about the caliber of the services received, customer contentment, and the possibility that the consumer will return to the same establishments. Satisfaction results from a product or service's perceived performance meeting or beyond pre-established expectations (confirmation). Conversely, unhappy people experience disconfirmation when their expectations and actual performance don't match Oliver, R. L. (1980).

### **Empirical Review**

Bayad et al (2021) did a research on hotel service quality and its impact on customer satisfaction. The study aimed to study the impact of service quality on customer satisfaction within the hospitality industry, particularly in hotels. To analyze data, quantitative method was used, using a random sampling to distribute and collect data from 111 participants. The result of the study shows the relationship between various dimensions of service quality and customer service.

Yae-Ji Kim, & Hak-Seon Kim (2021) did a study on the impact of hotel customer experience on customer satisfaction through online reviews. The aim of the study was to investigate the selection attributes of customers from online reviews in the hotel industry and understand their association with customer satisfaction. They collected data dataset consisting of 8229 reviews from Google travel website spinning from December 2019 to July 2021. They used text mining and semantic network analysis for analysis. Regression analysis was used for quantitative assessment. According to the study's findings, understanding the subtleties found in internet evaluations can provide insightful information that will help establish the strategic plans necessary for the hotel industry's long-term, sustainable growth.

Nguyen et al (2018) conducted a study on repeat customer behaviour and service quality in boutique hotels. This study examined the relationship between service quality and repeat customer behaviour with a focus on boutique hotels. It was discovered through surveys and

guest interviews that aspects of service quality such as ambiance, customized attention, and unique experiences had a big impact on whether or not guests choose to return.

Kwok & Yu, (2019) study investigated the role of customer feedback in enhancing service quality in luxury hotels. This study examined the function of consumer feedback mechanisms in improving the quality of services, with a focus on luxury hotels. It was shown through a mixed-method approach incorporating surveys and qualitative analysis that high-end customers' input greatly influenced improvements in service quality, especially in personalized services and facilities.

Travis Vu (2021) conducted a study on service quality and its impact on customer satisfaction. The study aimed to investigate the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction, acknowledging their critical role in influencing customer loyalty and purchasing decisions. The study used SERVQUAL model and other measurement methods to examine the impact of service quality on customer satisfaction. The result shows that service quality has an impact on customer satisfaction and perception.

Nguyen, T., Smith, A., & Johnson, L. (2018) did a study on Repeat Customer Behaviour and Service Quality in Boutique Hotels. This study examined the relationship between service quality and repeat customer behaviour with a focus on boutique hotels. It was discovered through surveys and guest interviews that aspects of service quality such as ambiance, customized attention, and unique experiences had a big impact on whether or not guests choose to return. The literature gap has to do with the lack of studies that explicitly look at customer satisfaction and service quality in the hospitality industry in Akwa Ibom State. Previous research has concentrated on various hospitality environments in other areas, but it lacks a contextual knowledge of the influence of customer preferences and feedback that is specific to Akwa Ibom. This gap emphasizes the necessity of focused study on the hospitality environment in the area to obtain locally relevant insights for raising customer satisfaction and service quality.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study's methodology takes a thorough approach to investigating the connection between customers feedback and service quality in Akwa Ibom State's hotel sector. This study uses a survey research approach in an effort to gather information about consumers' perceptions of the quality of the services they receive. People who have stayed in hotels in Akwa Ibom State make up the population under investigation. A sample size of 100 customers was chosen for the survey using the random sampling technique. A structured questionnaire was created to collect data, and it asked questions on features of customer feedback such as online reviews, recommendation rates, repeat customer behaviour, and complaint frequency. Additionally, open-ended questions were used to enable respondents to share in-depth explanations of their beliefs and experiences.

In terms of data analysis methodology, regression analysis was performed on the survey data that was gathered. A number of variables were employed as predictors of service quality,

including the complaint frequency, recommendation rates, online review scores, and repeat customer behaviour. The purpose of the analysis was to find correlations and evaluate how these factors affected the perception of service quality in the Akwa Ibom hospitality sector. This gave rise to a comprehensive picture of the opinions and experiences of patrons in Akwa Ibom State's hospitality industry.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Variables Entered/Removed<sup>a</sup>

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Complaint Frequency, Recommendation Rates, Online Review, Repeat Customer Behaviour <sup>b</sup>		Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Service Quality

b. All requested variables entered.

### Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. Change
1	.672 <sup>a</sup>	.451	.440	.775	.451	40.510	4	197	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Complaint Frequency, Recommendation Rates, Online Review, Repeat Customer Behaviour

### ANOVA<sup>a</sup>

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	97.404	4	24.351	40.510	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	118.418	197	.601		
	Total	215.822	201			

a. Dependent Variable: Service Quality

b. Predictors: (Constant), Complaint Frequency, Recommendation Rates, Online Review, Repeat Customer Behaviour

### Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.756	.352		7.830	.000
	Online Review	-.145	.045	-.189	-3.230	.001
	Recommendation Rates	.743	.107	.413	6.964	.000
	Repeat Customer Behaviour	-.087	.068	-.082	-1.291	.198
	Complaint Frequency	-.598	.125	-.308	-4.801	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Service Quality



The study entailed analyzing the correlation between multiple variables (such as complaint frequency, recommendation rates, online reviews, and repeat customer behaviour) and their effects on service quality within the Akwa Ibom State hotel sector. These predictor factors may account for about 45.1% of the variability in Service Quality, according to the regression analysis ( $R^2 = 0.451$ ), which showed a decent fit for the model.

The regression analysis, with complaint frequency, recommendation rates, online review and repeated customer behaviour as predictors of service quality, exhibited a good fit for the model ( $R^2 = 0.451$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.440$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

The online review revealed a negative standardized coefficient (-0.189), meaning that there was a statistically significant correlation between rising online review scores and falling perceived service quality ( $p = 0.001$ ). On the other hand, the recommendation rates showed a positive correlation ( $p < 0.0001$ ) with higher referral rates regarded to be of higher quality. Conversely, there was no appreciable relationship between Repeat Customer Behaviour and Service Quality ( $p = 0.198$ ). Additionally, there was a negative connection (-0.308) between complaint frequency and service quality, meaning that higher complaint rates were linked to worse service quality assessments ( $p < 0.001$ ).

These findings suggest that positive recommendations and fewer complaints contribute positively to the perceived Service Quality in the Akwa Ibom hospitality industry. However, higher online review ratings might have an adverse effect on the perception of Service Quality. These insights could guide establishments in improving Service Quality by focusing on effective handling of complaints and encouraging positive referrals, despite potential negative impacts from online reviews.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The results of a thorough analysis into the connection between client feedback and service quality in Akwa Ibom's hospitality sector were fascinating. Remarkably, there was a negative correlation found between greater online review scores and lower perceived service quality, suggesting that rising online review ratings have a detrimental effect. On the other hand, favourable recommendation rates were linked to higher opinions of the calibre of the services, highlighting the significance of word-of-mouth recommendations. Surprisingly, the perception of service quality was not greatly impacted by the behaviour of repeat customers. On the other hand, a higher complaint frequency showed a definite negative correlation with perceived service quality, indicating that higher complaint rates were associated with worse service quality evaluations. These results emphasize the dynamics of customer feedback and the complexity of the issues surrounding it. They also show that Akwa Ibom's hospitality establishments must prioritize positive referrals and efficient complaint handling over negative online reviews in order to improve overall customer satisfaction and service quality. The results of the study provide insight into how changing consumer tastes and views are. Businesses in the hospitality industry must understand that trends, sociocultural shifts, and technology improvements all have an impact on how customers choose to spend their money over time.

Establishments must therefore continue to innovate, keep flexible, and adjust their services in order to meet changing customer expectations.

The proposed strategic recommendations aimed at improving service quality in the Akwa Ibom hospitality industry take a comprehensive approach. First and first, in order to raise opinions of the quality of the services provided, it is imperative to prioritize efficient complaint management by quickly attending to and resolving client concerns. Good client recommendations can be amplified through loyalty programs or rewards, which help to foster a good sense of service quality. Online reviews and service quality are negatively correlated, but it is important to actively participate in these platforms, respond to criticism, and swiftly answer concerns in order to counteract unfavourable attitudes and promote a positive service perception. Sustained success in service quality within the Akwa Ibom hotel sector also requires fostering a culture of continuous improvement, keeping up with changing consumer needs, and putting ongoing improvements into practice.

Finally, the study highlights how critical customer input is in influencing how the Akwa Ibom hospitality business perceives the quality of its services. It offers useful information that businesses can use to improve service quality by concentrating on managing complaints well, promoting good recommendations, and online reviews. This article emphasizes that in order to satisfy changing customers' demands and support the expansion and prosperity of Akwa Ibom's hospitality industry, there must be constant development.

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