

Comparative Study of Service Quality in Nigerian Restaurant and Transport Business Organisations

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Abstract

A comparative study of customer perception of service delivery among 200 restaurant and 200 interstate transport sub-sector customers was done. The focus of the study was to determine customers' perception of service quality in the restaurant and transport industry with a view to ascertaining if there is significant difference between the two sub-sectors in terms of factors that cause customer dissatisfaction. The t-test and z-test were used to analysis the data collected from the customers through questionnaire.

Our finding revealed that customers of both service sub-sectors are fairly satisfied with a significant difference in their service offerings. The outcome of this study also indicated that the reasons for customer dissatisfaction are sub-sector specific and related to the core business of the service organisation. in the light of our finding, we propose that training and empowering of the frontline staff towards prompt customer service response and service recovery will help to reduce waiting time and improve employee attitudes in the restaurant and transport business organisations in Benin city in particular and the entire Nigeria in general.

Keywords: customer satisfaction, service quality, Nigeria

1. Introduction

All over the world, including Nigeria, the service industry is becoming the backbone of most economies because of its huge contribution to the nation's GDP (Agbonifoh, Ogwo & Nnolim, 2007). Gronroos (2000) defined a service as a process consisting of a 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 system of the service provider, which are provided as solutions to customer problems. This definition though complex, seeks to express the dynamic nature of services and the wide variety of settings in which they occur. Over the years, improving the quality of service delivery has attracted much attention in the extant literature (Kotler & Keller, 2009).

Unlike goods that can be objectively measured by indicators such as durability factor and defective rates (Crosby, 1979; Garvin 1983); Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) note that a service is an abstract and elusive construct for three unique reasons: intangibility, heterogeneity and inseparability of production and consumption. Though an abstract and elusive construct, quality in service delivery is crucial because it plays an increasingly pivotal role in both attracting and retaining service customers (Jensen & Markland, 1996) and in gaining competitive advantage (Santos & Matthews, 2001).

2. Literature Review

Both manufacturing and service organizations today give attention to the satisfaction of their customers because research reveals that an increasing level of customer satisfaction is positively correlated with customer loyalty and profitability (Wolemonwu, ND). Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) argue that there is a strong link between dissatisfaction and disloyalty or defection. They defined satisfaction as the customer's evaluation of a product or service in terms of whether that product or service has met their needs or expectations. Dissatisfaction results when a product's performance is less than the expectations.

From the above definition, we can observe that customers have expectations about the services that they receive. Oliver (1980) developed a customer satisfaction model which explained that when customers compare their perception of actual product/service performance with their expectations, then a feeling of satisfaction or

dissatisfaction arises. Any discrepancy between their expectations and the performance creates what they called a disconfirmation. Oliver (1980) identified three (3) types of disconfirmation: Positive Disconfirmation: this is when a product/service performance exceeds the customer's expectation. In this case, the customer is very satisfied. Negative Disconfirmation: this is when product/service performance is less than the customer's expectation. In this case the customer will be highly dissatisfied. Zero Disconfirmation: this is a situation where product/service performance equals customer expectation.

In addition, Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) proposed other factors that influences a customer's level of satisfaction to include product/service features, consumer emotion, attribution for service failure, perception of equity or fairness and other consumers/family members/co-workers' perception. But more importantly, researchers like Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml (1985); Kassim and Abdullah, (2010); Bedi (2010) identified quality of service offering as a major factor that determines customer satisfaction.

O'Neil and Palmer (2004) observed that service quality and the degree of satisfaction derived from service quality is becoming the single most important differentiating factor in almost every service sub sector. Quality has been defined in different ways by different authors. In a bid to harmonize the various definitions, Garvin (1988) identified five (5) perspectives of quality that influence the definition that is offered for it:

- The transcendental view of quality. This view sees quality as been synonymous with innate excellence. This view point is applied to performing and visual arts. It argues that people learn to recognize quality only through the experience gained through repeated exposure.
- The product based approach. This sees quality as a precise measurable variable. it argues that difference in quality reflects difference in the amount of an ingredient or attribute possessed by the product.
- User based definition. This starts with the premise that quality lies in the eyes of the beholder. This definition recognizes that different customers have different wants and needs and so equate quality with maximum satisfaction.
- The manufacturing based approach is usually adopted in engineering and manufacturing practices. This approach defines quality as conformance to internally developed specification which is often driven by productivity and cost maintenance goals.
- Value based definition sees quality in terms of value and price. By considering the trade-off between performance (or conformance) and price, quality comes to be defined as 'affordable excellence'.

The conceptualization of service quality, its relationship to satisfaction and methods for measuring and operationalising the construct has been at the centre of service literature debate for some decades now. In an attempt to measure quality, Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml (1985), identified ten key determinants of service quality namely reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, understanding and tangibles. The study of Parasuraman et al. (1988) came up with an instrument for measuring consumers' perception of service quality called SERVQUAL. In SERVQUAL, the ten original dimensions had been refined to five (5) namely: *Tangibles*—Physical facilities, appearance of personnel and equipment; *Reliability*—ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately; *Responsiveness*—willingness to help customers provide prompt services; *Assurance*—this is a combination of items designed to originally assess competence, courtesy, credibility, and security. It is the ability of an organisation's employees to inspire trust and confidence in customers about the organisation through their knowledge and courtesy; *Empathy*—care and individualised attention given to customers. The study of Parasuraman et al. (1988) also found that customers irrespective of the service industry ranked in order of importance, reliability in the first position and tangibles in the last position. In a study conducted by Andaleeb and Conway (2006), on Customer satisfaction in the restaurant industry in the United States, responsiveness of the frontline employees was found to make the highest impact on customer satisfaction than price and food quality.

According to Parasuraman et al. (1988), the SERVQUAL tool can assist the service and retail organizations in determining consumer expectations and service quality perception with a view to improving service quality. Researchers such as Carman (1990); Brown, Churchill & Peter (1993); Cronin & Taylor, (1992); Gilmore (2003) have criticized SERVQUAL for a number of reasons which are not discussed in this study. In spite of the criticisms, SERVQUAL has dominated the literature in the field of service quality (Gabbath & Hogg, 1997; Lovelock & Wirtz, 2004). In the view of Smith (1995), the SERVQUAL scale can be modified to suit the needs of the researcher and practitioner. This study adopts the SERVQUAL as a measuring instrument for determining the quality of services in Nigerian service organisations.

A number of studies have been done either focusing on service delivery in the transport businesses (Khurshid, Naeem, Ejaz, Mukhtar & Batool, 2012; Kennedy, 2011) or the restaurant outfits (Andaleeb & Conway, 2006; Heung & Lam, 2003). But not much has been done on comparing the service delivery in the two sectors with a view to unearthing the significant differences in their service offerings. It is also not known if customer satisfaction level in the transport businesses is comparable to that of the restaurant service outfits? Are the service quality dimensions in transport business of the same critical importance with those of the restaurant business? In conclusion, are the causes of dissatisfaction in the transport business same with those of the restaurant service organisations? In the light of the foregoing, the present study sought answers to the above questions

3. Methodology

3.1 The Population and Sample

Though the conclusion of this study is inferred to service organizations in Nigeria, it is practically impossible to study the totality of firms in the service industry. This study focuses on the restaurant and interstate transportation industries. The population of this study therefore comprise of consumers in both industries in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. Since it was not possible to generate a sampling frame, we have on the basis of judgmental sampling (a non-probability sampling method) chosen to work with a sample size of 400 respondents-200 restaurant customers and 200 transport customers. According to Agbonifoh and Yomere (1999), judgmental sampling is ideal when one wants to study a small subset of a large population in which many members of the subset are easily identified but the enumeration of all of them would be nearly impossible. This is the case with consumers who patronize the restaurant and inter-state transport business organisations in Benin City.

In a bid to adequately cover Benin City, respondents were selected by means of convenient sampling from the four (4) local government areas that make up the capital city namely: Oredo, Egor, Ikpoba Okha and Ovia North East local government council areas. The University of Benin and UBTH communities were selected to represent Ovia North East, Benson Idahosa University and its environs to represent Ikpoba Okha, the Secretariat and its environs on Sapele road to represent Oredo and Uselu market and its environs to represent Egor. 50 questionnaires each was administered to transport and restaurant customers in the selected areas.

The first part of this questionnaire was an introduction; the second part focused on key demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the respondents such as gender, age, highest educational qualification and income level. It also asks for the frequency of respondents' patronage of restaurants and inter-state transport companies. In the third part, the SERVQUAL dimensions (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) were measured on a five point scale ranging from very dissatisfied (1) to very satisfied (5) to determine customers' perception of service quality and possible reasons for dissatisfaction. Descriptive statistical tools (mean) t test and Z-test at 0.05 level of significance were conducted to analyse data.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Of the 400 questionnaires administered, 371 (93 per cent response rate) questionnaires were retrieved with 185 from restaurant respondents and 186 from interstate transport respondents. Tables 1 present the demographic characteristics of the respondents in each of the selected service sub-sectors and both combined. The final sample consisted of 208 (58%) males and 149 (42%) female. The modal age class for restaurant was 18-24 with frequency of 82 respondents and 25-34 (78 respondents) for the transport sector. As for the educational characteristics, restaurant customers generally had lower educational (Secondary level) than the transport sub-sector. At the tertiary level, both subsectors had their highest number of respondents with 218 (61.5%) graduate population. Income group I (N50,000 and below) had the highest number of respondents for each sector. (Restaurant-93; Transport-79)

Table 1. Demographic profile of restaurant and interstate transport respondents

Demographic Characteristics	Respondent Category	Frequency for Restaurant	Frequency for Transport	Frequency for both sectors	Percentage for both sectors
Gender	Male	105	103	208	58
	Female	74	75	149	42
	TOTAL	179	178	357	100
Age	18–24	82	67	149	41
	25–34	62	78	140	39
	35–44	22	22	44	12
	45–54	13	11	24	7
	55 or Above	1	3	4	1
	TOTAL	180	181	361	100
Educational Level	Primary	2	1	3	0.9
	Secondary	33	20	53	14.9
	Tertiary	105	113	218	61.5
	Postgraduate	39	41	80	22.5
	TOTAL	179	175	354	100
Income Per Month	N50,000 and Below	93	79	172	52
	N50,001–N100,000	37	37	74	23
	N100,001–N150,000	11	14	25	7
	N150,001–N200,000	14	12	26	8
	N200,001–Above	11	20	31	10
	TOTAL	166	162	328	100

Source: authors' fieldwork.

Table 2 shows respondents' rating of the SERVQUAL dimensions. For the restaurant business, the reliability dimension was scored highest (3.83), followed by tangibility (3.79), empathy (3.61), assurance (3.60) and lastly, responsiveness (3.58). While for the transport companies, tangibility was rated highest with an index of 3.78, followed by reliability (3.75), assurance (3.58), empathy (3.45) and lastly (3.41) responsiveness as in the restaurant sub sector. The result of the one sample test statistics indicates that all indices measuring service quality dimension were significantly different from the mid score of 3 at a 0.05 per cent level of significance implying that the consumers are relatively satisfied on all the service elements for both sub-sectors. Based on customers' perception of the various dimension, it can be inferred that the two service organisations performed comparably well in the areas of tangibility and reliability and least on the responsiveness dimension.

Table 2. Index of customers' assessment of service quality and one-sample statistics: test of difference from mean for service quality in the restaurant and interstate transport subsectors

SERVICE QUALITY DIMENSIONS	Restaurant Subsector				Interstate Transport Subsector			
	N	INDEX	t	Sig. (2-tailed)	N	INDEX	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
1. The restaurant's premises (eg neatness and beauty)	179	3.96	18.645	.000	179	3.84	11.235	.000
2. Facilities and equipment	178	3.84	13.899	.000	179	3.93	14.628	.000
3. Employee Dressing	177	3.59	8.418	.000	177	3.56	7.132	.000
TANGIBILITY		3.79				3.78		
4. Operating hours of the restaurant	177	3.95	18.002	.000	169	3.91	13.381	.000
5. The way or manner you are attended to by employees of the restaurant	178	3.92	13.653	.000	174	3.65	7.858	.000
6. The speed with which you are attended to	178	3.64	8.797	.000	176	3.66	8.446	.000
7. Quality of service provided	178	3.81	13.044	.000	175	3.77	11.108	.000
RELIABILITY		3.83				3.75		
8. The speed with your complaints are handled	173	3.50	7.149	.000	176	3.41	5.045	.000
9. The willingness of employees to help	175	3.63	9.142	.000	176	3.43	5.355	.000

customers									
10. The way customers' problems are handled	175	3.62	8.872	.000	175	3.38	4.837	.000	
RESPONSIVENESS		3.58				3.41			
11. The security/safety at the restaurant	174	3.57	8.864	.000	176	3.70	9.166	.000	
12. The level of knowledge about their job that employees display	178	3.50	7.769	.000	178	3.65	9.762	.000	
13. Employee politeness towards customers	177	3.76	13.325	.000	177	3.53	6.523	.000	
14. Employee honesty with customers.	175	3.58	8.947	.000	174	3.45	5.987	.000	
ASSURANCE		3.60				3.58			
15. Efforts made by the restaurant to understand my needs	177	3.54	8.576	.000	176	3.32	4.230	.000	
16. Extent to which the restaurant works with your complaints/comments/suggestions	175	3.45	7.272	.000	174	3.28	3.825	.000	
17. The extent to which the restaurant seems to have your interest at heart	178	3.55	9.674	.000	175	3.47	6.634	.000	
18. The overall service quality of the restaurants you have used in the last 6 months?	173	3.88	15.595	.000	170	3.73	10.178	.000	
EMPATHY		3.61				3.45			

Note. t value=3. Source: Authors' fieldwork.

4.2 Comparison of Service Quality in the Restaurant and Interstate Transport Sub-Sector

Table 3 presents a summary of the aggregated index of service quality for the two sub-sectors. In all the service quality dimensions, restaurant respondents expressed a higher satisfaction than their transport counterparts. At the dimension level, the result of the Z-test only shows significant differences between the two service organisations in the areas of reliability, responsiveness and empathy (See Table 3). On the aggregate, across the five dimensions, the restaurant customers indicated mean satisfaction level of 3.68 which is slightly above 3.59, the mean index of the transport respondents. On a final note, the Z-test score of 5.960 also revealed significant difference between the two service sub-sectors in terms of overall service quality perception.

Table 3. Aggregated service quality index for each sub sector

Service Quality Dimensions	Service Sectors		Sub Sectors		Z-Score	Decision
	Restaurant	Rank for Restaurant	Transport Companies	Rank for Transport		
Tangibility	3.79	2	3.78	1	0.6623	Not Significant at 0.05 level
Reliability	3.83	1	3.75	2	5.2980	Significant at 0.05 level
Responsiveness	3.58	5	3.41	5	11.2583	Significant at 0.05 level
Assurance	3.60	4	3.58	3	1.3245	Not Significant at 0.05 level
Empathy	3.61	3	3.45	4	10.5960	Significant at 0.05 level
Aggregated Average	3.68		3.59		5.960	Significant at 0.05 level
Variance	0.014		0.028			

Note. $n_1=185$, $n_2=186$; Source: Authors' fieldwork.

4.3 Causes of Dissatisfaction in Both Sub-Sectors

The common causes of dissatisfaction as stated by respondents in the restaurant and interstate transport sectors are presented in tables 4 and 5 respectively.

Table 4. Common causes of customer dissatisfaction in restaurants

S/N	Reasons	Frequency	Proportion of Total Complaints	Proportion of Total Respondents
1.	Delay in attending to customers	16	21.92	8.65
2.	Dirty environment	11	15.07	5.95
3.	Impoliteness of staff	11	15.07	5.95
4.	Food not properly cooked	9	12.33	4.86
5.	Spoilt/soured food	9	12.33	4.86
6.	Rough/indecent dressing of employees	3	4.11	1.62
7.	Quantity of food served	3	4.11	1.62
8.	Not enough employees to attend to customers	3	4.11	1.62
9.	Temperature of food/drink	2	2.74	1.08
10.	Employees tried to short change customers	2	2.74	1.08
11.	No water in the rest room	2	2.74	1.08
12.	Unavailability of food	1	1.37	0.54
13.	Employee body odour	1	1.37	0.54
	Total	73	100.00	39.45

Table 4 presents in order of severity the catalogue of the causes of customer dissatisfaction in the restaurant service sub-sector. Lack of prompt service was ranked first by 16 respondents followed by dirty environment and impolite staff; unavailability of food and employee body odour in the last position. A careful analysis of the first four sources of dissatisfaction in the transport service provision indicated that customers are more concerned with employee attitudes, drivers' safety consciousness, the ambience and seating arrangement of the transport vehicle, and waiting time for departure. By implication, the restaurant customers seem to value quick response and hygienic environment over and above the transport customers. This assertion could be inferred from the ratings of the dissatisfaction factors (See Table 4 & 5). Delay in attendance was ranked first in the restaurant subsector, while in the transport subsector, it was ranked fourth. In a similar manner, dirty environment was ranked second in the restaurant sub-sector but seventh in the transport sub-sector. Irrespective of the ranking position of the factors causing dissatisfaction, both samples were found to share some characteristics in service offerings. This observation is akin to that of Berry and Bendapudi (2007) who found that though hairdressing and health care services share some common features, there are some dissimilarities between them.

Table 5. Common causes of customer dissatisfaction in interstate transport companies

S/N	Reasons	Frequency	Proportion of Total Complaints	Proportion of Total Respondents
1.	Impolite/rude drivers/frontline employees	28	30.43	15.05
2.	Rough/reckless driving	13	14.13	6.99
3.	Uncomfortable seating arrangement/overloading of bus	12	13.04	6.45
4.	Delay in departure	10	10.87	5.38
5.	Inflated/unusually high fare	7	7.61	3.76
6.	Breakdown of vehicle during journey	6	6.52	3.23
7.	Dirty environment	5	5.43	2.69
8.	Facilities (A/C, TV, etc) in vehicle were not working	4	4.35	2.15
9.	Unorganised/rowdy park	3	3.26	1.61
10.	Improper handling of luggage	2	2.17	1.08
11.	Unavailability of vehicle	1	1.09	0.54
12.	Missing Luggage	1	1.09	0.54
	Total	92	100.00	49.47

Source: Authors' fieldwork.

The reasons given for dissatisfaction in the two service sub-sectors clearly indicate that service offerings are largely subject to variation irrespective of the industry. This observation appears to confirm one of the key

characteristics of the service industry (Agbonifoh et al., 2007). A quick analysis shows that the factors causing dissatisfaction among the service customers tend not only to be industry specific but also unique to service firms within the industry. This conclusion may be pictured in the huge difference in the number of people that indicated 'impolite workers factor' in the restaurant (11) and 28 in the transport. Additionally, dissatisfaction factors that were keys in the restaurant sector were not critical in the other. The key dissatisfaction factors were highly related to the core business of the two sub-sectors. For example, delay in service and unhealthy physical environment were rated highly among the dissatisfaction variables in the restaurant. A possible explanation for these reasons may be due to the immediate physical discomfort or pain that would be experienced by the customer if food is not served promptly. Secondly, the dirty/unhygienic environment would not only be perceived as capable of causing food poison but could scare customers into losing appetite. On the other hand, the first two factors causing dissatisfaction are: impolite driver/workers and reckless driving. Rude and unfriendly drivers are most likely to drive roughly which might result in accident and loss of lives. In other words, it can be seen that service customers tend to be very conscious of encountering bodily harm in the process of service experience.

A common factor which appears to be critical to the two sub-sectors is employee poor attitudes towards customers (assurance dimension) this factor was rated first in the transport service and second in the restaurant service business. This factor is a major determinant of customer satisfaction. Our finding in this regard tends to support Wansoo's (2009) observation that customer satisfaction is influenced by the interpersonal encounter between customers and employees in the service setting. A comparative analysis of the two service sub-sectors revealed that transport customers are more price sensitive as none of the restaurant customers indicated concern over pricing especially unstable pricing, this finding in a way points to the price discrimination tendencies of the transport service providers which is a criticism levelled against service provider in Agbonifoh et al. (2007).

On a general note, the factors causing dissatisfaction appears to be peculiar to the service sub-sector that is, relating to the core business of the sector. Our observation here tends to support the study of Tam (2012) which found that the performance of the core service is vital to customer satisfaction and perceived value. Other identified factors are connected to physical evidence and responsiveness (employee attitude). Respondents' complaint about neatness/healthy condition of the environment relate to physical evidence which Kotler and Keller (2009) notes as causing uncertainty in customers. According to them, consumers are observant of evidence of service quality by drawing inferences from place, people, equipment, communication material, symbols and price. Nevertheless, our results appear to support that of Tam (2012) that the effect of physical environment on customer satisfaction differs depending on the service context. Specifically, he discovered that physical environment did not have significant influence on hairdressing services except on the health care services. In this present study, physical environment was rated more highly in the restaurant sample than in the transport as factors leading to dissatisfaction.

5. Recommendation and Conclusion

The data collected from both the selected restaurant and transport service customers in Benin City were analysed and the summary of the findings are as follows. First, customers are fairly satisfied with the level quality in the Nigerian service organisations studied. Secondly, respondents rated the restaurant sub-sector better than the interstate transport sub-sector only on the reliability, responsiveness and empathy dimensions and not on the tangibility and assurance dimensions of service quality. Findings also show that across the five dimensions, the restaurant sub-sector performed better than the transport sub-sector. Thirdly, dissatisfaction in the service sub-sectors studied mainly arose from the inadequacies in the core business of the organisation that is, the physical evidence and employee attitude. Fourthly, the two service organisations are better in customer perception in the area of tangibility and reliability and poorest in responsiveness. Lastly, the transport service customers tend to show more concern on price factor as indicated in the reasons for dissatisfaction in service quality.

Notwithstanding customers' fairly satisfactory assessment of service quality in these two sub-sectors, there is still the urgent needs for improvement on all the service dimensions—tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Aside from giving attention to manage the physical evidence/facilities, both sub-sectors (especially the interstate transport sub-sector) must of necessity begin to give attention to the interpersonal relations between customers and employees. Service organizations in the subsector studied must be cautious in the recruitment/selection of personnel. Priority in the recruitment/selection process must be given to persons who are naturally good natured, tolerant and have a service attitude. Frontline staff must also be trained and retrained on customer orientation, customer service knowledge and interpersonal relations/communication skills. This point is particularly key as research has shown that humans tend to develop emotional bonds with

people who seem particularly responsive to their needs (Vlachos, Theotokis, Pramataris & Vrechopoulos, 2010). Given the relatively poor results obtained in the area of responsiveness, we suggest that service providers as a matter of compulsion, put in place plans to enhance workers' ability to promptly meet the needs of the customers and to also recover failing service without much reference to the superior. In the advice of Tam (2012), interactive communications enables the service provider listen and understand customers' conditions and to serve them efficiently.

Despite the contributions of this work, it has some limitations and therefore offers opportunity for further research. Since this study was carried out at the subsector level, we recommend that further study be done to determine top service provider/organisation within each sub-sector using the SERVQUAL dimensions. Such studies will help to unearth reasons for customers' perception of organisations' service quality and hence determine strategies for enhancing service performance. Secondly, additional studies can also be conducted to explore customers' perception of service quality in other service sub-sectors outside the restaurant and interstate transport sub sectors in Benin City. Lastly, the sample size used could be increased to see how that would affect the conclusions of this study.

In conclusion, we propose that training and empowering of the frontline staff towards prompt customer service response and service recovery will help to reduce waiting time and improve employee attitudes in the restaurant and transport business organisations in Benin City in particular and Nigeria in general.

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