CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT SERVICES AND CUSTOMERS SATISFACTION OF HOTELS IN PORT HARCOURT

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Abstract

The study examined the influence of quality service of customer involvement of hotels on customer satisfaction. As hospitality based study, data were generated from 100 customers of all the 10 registered and quoted hotels operating in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, at a ratio of 10 customers's per. hotels using a questionnaire. The generated data were analyzed using spearman ranked correlation coefficient statistical tool. Result showed that all the dimensions of customer involvement services used in the study has a positive influence on customer's satisfaction. However, customer loyalty was found to be the most influential. In view of the findings, the hotels were advised to ensure that customers' satisfaction is the bed rock of upgrading existing and or installing new customer's involvement services platforms as well as creating adequate awareness about these involvements.

Key words: *customer's satisfaction, hotel industry, customer loyalty, customer's patronage, brand loyalty, and word-of-mouth.*

Introduction

In hotel industry Customer satisfaction based upon the high quality attached to a service. Quality of service can determine whether a business should fail or succeed (Gronoos, 1990; parasuramanetal., 1988).

As Valdani (2009) points out that: an organization come into place as a result of having customers to serve. The best way to achieve a sustainable advantage in the market is to deliver a high quality of service to will result in repeat patronage. (Shemwell et al,1998) Service quality and customer's satisfaction are the key factors for obtaining competitive advantage and customer retention.

In providing a service to customers, certain gaps may exist when the service provider is unable to reach the gap of service delivery and service expectation.

Lewis and Boom (1985) had noted that: service quality is measured on how well the service is being carried out. Delivering a good service entails that customers expectation must have been and is very consistent. The silent word here is ''consistent''. This means that any enterprise which is not steady pace in service delivery cannot be said to be offering a good quality service. Therefore, it will difficult for customers make up their mind and have a fixed decision to continue repeat purchase of that service. Let us illustrate our discussion on a hotel. A customer visits a hotel several times but noticed that out of the five times he visited the hotel only twice did he feel alright while the other three times were horrible for him. By all this observation you can see that the customer is not satisfied, his expectation was altered. He didn't get value for his money. Because of this he might not have his mind fixed on this hotel as he might find comfort elsewhere.

Kelly and Davies (1994:52) one bad service can alter every other good service given previously. When a bad service is evaluated customers will definitely search for alternative service providers.

Research Problem

Overtime based on competition the success of a hospitality industry has become a major concern for most service providers. However, many studies have been conducted in relation to the problem. I feel that with this dimensions the study should have a positive outcome. Customer satisfaction is an important aspect of every successful business including the hotel industry in Port Harcourt. In

that regard every business should strive to have a good relationship with its customers to enhance loyalty and thus increase its profitability. However, many hotel managers face problems trying to satisfy their customers and end up experiencing high levels of customer dissatisfaction. The problem can be solved by learning customer needs and using the knowledge to increase satisfaction. This study digs deeper into different ways of improving customer satisfaction.

In modern age when almost everything comes handy, customers have become less appreciative and difficult to please with advancement in technology and accessibility of information product quality among competing brands and hotel industry are almost equal. Hence the determining factor in choosing the brand or company lies in the customer service. The customer involvement services can only be a way of increasing awareness through word of mouth.

Aims and Objectives of the Study
The aim of this study is examine the relationships between customer involvement services and customer's satisfaction of hotels in Port Harcourt.

Research Hypotheses
H_1 There is no significant relationship between response involvement and customer loyalty of hotels in Port Harcourt.

H_2 There is no significant relationship between situational involvement and customer loyalty of hotels in Port Harcourt.

H_3 There is no significant relationship between enduring involvement and customer loyalty of hotels in Port Harcourt.

Theoretical Foundation
The Contrast Theory
The Contrast Theory suggests the opposite of the Dissonance Theory. According to this theory, when actual product performance falls short of consumer's expectations about the product, the contrast between the expectation and outcome will cause the consumer to exaggerate the disparity (Yi, 1990). The Contrast theory maintains that a customer who receives a product less valuable than expected, will magnify the difference between

the product received and the product expected (Cardozzo, 1965). This theory predicts that product performance below expectations will be rated poorer than it is in reality (Oliver &DeSarbo, 1988). In other words, the Contrast Theory would assume that "outcomes deviating from expectations will cause the subject to favorably or unfavorably react to the disconfirmation experience in that a negative disconfirmation is believed to result in a poor product evaluation, whereas positive disconfirmation should cause the product to be highly appraised" (Oliver, 1977). In terms of the above restaurant situation, the consumer might say that the restaurant was one of the worst he or she had ever been and the food was unfit for human consumption, etc.

Review of Related Literature
Customer Involvement
Consumer involvement is defined as a state of mind that motivates consumers to identify with product or service offerings, their consumption patterns and also their consumption behaviors. Involvement creates within customers an urge to search for and consider the service or product category and the different options before initiating a purchase. It is the amount of efforts a consumer puts in making a purchase decision. In making a purchase decision, variations across persons across product or service offerings in question as well as purchase situation and time at hand.

Customers involvement can be primarily divided into three types which are:
- Response involvement
- Situational involvement
- Enduring involvement

Response Involvement
In simple words means the level of complexity or extensiveness a consumer pursues in gathering information about a product or service. For instance, I want to purchase a car of a specific brand, and so I carryout extensive search for information concerning the product and then carefully consider the whole gathered information to initiate a purchase or not bother to initiate a purchase decision.(Houston, M.J & Rothschild,

M.L.,1978). This form of involvement refers to a behavioral orientation which involves information acquisition and decision processes (Leavitt, et al., 1981). In this context, involvement is seen as behavior rather than as a mediator of behavior (Laaksonen, 1994). The extent of information search and product acquisition time have both been used to conceptualize and measure response involvement, although it is commonly accepted that they represent possible outcomes of involvement (such as extended problem solving) rather than involvement per se (Cohen, 1983; Dholakia, 1997; Kapferer and Laurent, 1985; Kinley et al. 1999). Caution is needed in defining involvement as a behavioral process, since there are other variables that are likely to determine such processes (Antil, 1984; Mitchell, 1979; Tyebjee, 1979). Response involvement is one of the two elements of the dichotomy proposed by Stone (1984), which represents the third distinction between forms of involvement. He suggested looking at involvement as both a 'mental state' and a 'behavioral' process. Stone's (1984) conceptualization of involvement as a 'mental state' differs from Rothschild's view of situational involvement in that he incorporates elements of both situational and enduring involvements.

Situational Involvement

The situational involvement is when a customer takes interest in a particular brand due to the situation fit. In this case, situation fit means where product or service fit a situation in which a customer finds himself. For instance, am hungry and so I am searching for something to eat (situation) and I buy a particular type of food to quench my hunger.(Houston, M.J & Rothschild, M.L.,1978). The basic property of this type of involvement is that it represents a 'mental state' in the form of a temporary concern with a stimulus object. Definitions view this form of involvement as a matter of intensity, referring to the degree of, the amount of or the level of interest, motivation, or arousal. Thus Rothschild (1984, p217) mentions "a state of interest, motivation or arousal", while Mitchell (1979, p194) refers to "…an individual's

level, internal state variable that indicates the amount of arousal, interest or drive". Unlike enduring involvement, situational involvement represents a 'mind set'; a temporary concern with a stimulus object that is usually aroused by a particular cause such as perceived risk (Dholakia, 1997).

Enduring Involvement

This is when a customer takes interest in a particular product or service because of his or her past experience with the product. It has to do with previous experience acquired by a person for a particular brand. It could be either positive or negative.(Houston, M.J & Rothschild, M.L.,1978). In conceptualizing enduring involvement, authors have adopted the social psychological perspective of 'ego involvement' which considers the perceived personal relevance of an object to an individual (e.g. Zaichkowsky, 1985; 1994). This approach treats involvement as the intensity of an attitude which is dependent on the importance of that attitude (Sherif and Sherif, 1967). Consequently, involvement is viewed as a property of an attitude, which is enduring or stable over time. In the consumer behavior domain, many researchers define involvement as the degree of psychological connection between an individual and a stimulus object, such as a product, brand, advertisement, task, or idea (Bloch, 1981; Celsi and Olson, 1988; Hupfer and Gardner, 1971; Lastovicka and Gardner, 1979).

Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction has been one of the tools for a business success. customer satisfaction is defined as an overall evaluation based on the total purchase and consumption experience with the good or service overtime (Fornell, Johnson, Anderson, Cha &Bryant 1996). Based on marketing, customer satisfaction also comes along with it which means it ascertains the expectation of the customer on how the goods and services are being facilitated by the companies (Oliver 1999).

However, the product and its characteristics, function, reliability, sales activity and customers

support are the most essential topics needed to meet or exceed the satisfaction of the customers. It observed that a satisfied customer is a happy customer, satisfied customers always comeback to repurchase or buy more. Besides buying more, they also work as networks to reach other potential customers by sharing their good experiences (Hague & Hague 2016). In situation were an organization have an old customer, it is very important to keep a good relationship with that customer(Rebekah & Sharyn, 2004).

Customers satisfaction can provide an organization can provide an organization with benefits like customer loyalty, extending the life cycle of a customer, expanding the life of merchandize the customer purchase and increases customer positive word of mouth communication. When a customer is satisfied with a product or service of a firm, it makes customers patronize your product regularly and to recommend your product and services to other potential customers. It is impossible for a business organization to grow if the managements ignore the need satisfactions of customers (Tao, 2004).In recent years, hotel industries have been known for its competitive nature. So it is important to know that customer's loyalty should be a key aspect of enhancing competitiveness in the industry as well as ensuring business continuity.

In any event that a customer of a particular service is satisfied with a brand the most likely become very loyal customers and they go ahead spreading good word of mouth of the hotel. In case the service or product is bad the customer will surely spread bad word of mouth about the hotel bad experience they had.
Nurminen, (2007), discovered that cost is not the main reason that cause dissatisfaction of customer. Customer dissatisfaction could be as a result of offering low quality product or service to consumers. It is through high quality products and service that a customer can get satisfied and repeat purchase when in need of same services or product.

Customer loyalty is as a result of good measure of the quality of services offered to customers in need. Most hotels now need to implore or create strategies to improve their lapsing quality of services by measuring the level of their customer's loyalty. By doing this, it gives the management of a hotel a good reason to understand the needs and want of their customers and keep offering good quality services to them.

According to Mathews (2008), the main issue most hotels industries face is the difficulty in satisfying their customers while at the same time make huge profits. Competition makes the hotel industries to be more creative and innovative about things that related in satisfying a needy customer. A hotel management has to come up with unique ways to meet up with the satisfactory needs of a potential customer while at the same time making the budgeted profit margin.

 In a scenario, where providing high quality services and improving customer's satisfaction is widely noticed as the main reason for hotel growth performance, you will discover that the growth and profit generated from just quality services will be over emphasized. Therefore, hotels with high quality service performances are more profitable. A research by Wuest et al (1996) defined the perception of hotel attributes as the degree to which guests may find various services and facilities critical for their stay in a hotel. Hotels attributes such as cleanliness, price, location, security, personal service, physical attractiveness, opportunity for relaxation, standard of services appealing image, and reputation are recognized as decisive by travelers to assess the quality of the hotels (Atkinsons, 1988; Ananth et al.; 1992; Barsky&Labagh, 1992; Cadotte& Turgeon, 1988; Knutson, 1988; Mccleary et al; 1993; Rivers et al.; 1991; Wilensky&Buttlle, 1988).If you must build customers loyalty, then customers satisfaction is inevitable. A loyal customer will repeat purchase while an unsatisfied customer will be a danger for a hotel business, the effect of bad words of mouth comes to play when the customer is unsatisfied. All the above mentioned attributes if ignored can have

serious effect on service patronage of a hotel industry.

Hence, both exploring the importance of customer of single attributes in hotels selection and to systematically survey their level of satisfaction are indispensable. Research on the topic of guest satisfaction, which translate into the consideration of whether or not customers will return to a hotel or advise it to other tourist or customers is important to the success of the hotel industry neglecting or refusal to give attention to those hotel attributes considered important by a consumer can lead to negative result of the hotel which will sure limit repeat patronage.

There are many types of service involving a sequence in which consumers may decide to choose a service specification, that is selecting how and when a service should be performed. This selection can be dominated by the service providers, or customers and maybe the both of them could jointly select specifications. Consumers engage in service in different encounters. These behaviors include seeking referrals, researching alternative providers, and gathering information prior to the encounter by keeping a good relationship and also providing social support (Adelman et al., 1994). Customers act and behave like partial employees (Bowen, 1986) the may also act as supervisors in motivating service providers to perform. The effect of consumers' involvement has been analysed with regards to services quality (Cermark et al., 1994; Ennew and Binks, 1996; Dong et al., 2015), customer loyalty (Ennew and Binks,1999; Eisingerich and Bell, 2006; Auh et al.,2007), and customer satisfaction.

However, we do not pin point on customer's involvement at the production or realization stage of the service process but rather on customer's involvement at the specification stage. We need to consider the fact that for many services, customers prefer to purchase a promise that the provider made to deliver a service according to what was specified by the customer. If promises are kept the will be repeat purchase and also good word of mouth to other prospective customers.

Furthermore, word of mouth is very important for hotel businesses. This is good for hotel growth and patronage by customers. In these cases, word of mouth helps reduce risk or uncertainty of most prospective customers. (Darby & Kami, 1973).

File et al., (1992). Propose that customer's involvement is one of the keys to produce word-of-mouth. Similarly, Pozsnanski (2007), argues that customer's involvement services positively affect word-of-mouth through its three antecedents perceived quality, relationship quality, and customer retention.

As indicated by Peters and Pikkemaat (2005), the staffs play a key role in making sure that customers' needs and wants are met. A successful staff's evaluation project will make sure hotel management streamlines the performance of staffs while serving customers. Therefore, leaders or managers of the hotel industry should use feedback of customers to access the performance of the staffs.

Morrison and O" Mahoney (2002). Proposed a method that can enhance or boost quality of services being offered by hotel industries in Nigeria. The evaluation techniques are based on the responsive demands and complaints. The manager does this to ensure effectiveness and efficiency of their staffs based on speedy delivery of a service rendered. Based on this techniques, customers will feel that their needs are met in time and accordingly. These techniques help to show responsiveness to speedy delivery of service thereby eliminating dissatisfaction of customers. One of the key strategies used to enhance customer satisfaction is benchmarking. This strategy helps hotel industries to learn from other hotel industry and observe what makes their competitors competent enough to compete in some cases. Most hotels do not share vital information with others; the only way the get to notice or learn from the other hotels is through innovativeness. Hotel innovative advantage enables prosperous hotels to create new strategies and also enable competitive advantage with their rivals. For hotels in Nigeria to achieve greater heights of customer satisfaction and loyalty, managers must be ready and willing to adapt to the needs and wants of customers. Hotel managers must put much more efforts in trying to understand consumer needs and wants, try as much as possible to fulfill them and in return gain customer's satisfaction. Customers satisfaction must be given utmost consideration

because it is more expensive to draw a new customer than keeping the new ones. It is better managers focus on keeping existing customer than satisfying their needs before going in search for new ones.

In hotel industry, customer loyalty is mostly enhanced by a combined effort of stakeholders. Therefore, the hotel can only be glorious in terms of customer's satisfaction by involving all stakeholders in enhancing quality of its services and products (Sing and Dewan, 2009).

Customers Loyalty

Oliver, (1993). Defines loyalty as a deeply held commitment to rebuild and re-patronize a preferred product or services regularly not minding situational influences and marketing effort.

Thomas and Tobe, (2013). Emphasize that: loyalty is much more profitable". The expenses spent on

trying to get a new customer is much more than retaining an old customer. A loyal customer will always encourage others to buy. Customers loyalty is not just built in a day; it is built overtime across multiple transactions keep a good relationship with a customer is equally important in customer loyalty and this needs that an organization will work in high context that extends beyond itself, as no company can be relevant at everything (McDonald & Keen 2000).

Gremler and Brown (1999), the both divided customer's loyalty in to three different categories that includes behavior loyalty, intentional loyalty, emotional loyalty. Behavior loyalty is repeating purchase behavior while intentional loyalty is having an intention to make a purchase and emotional loyalty has todo with what a customer's feels for a brand based on its value, passion and ideas.

Conceptual Review
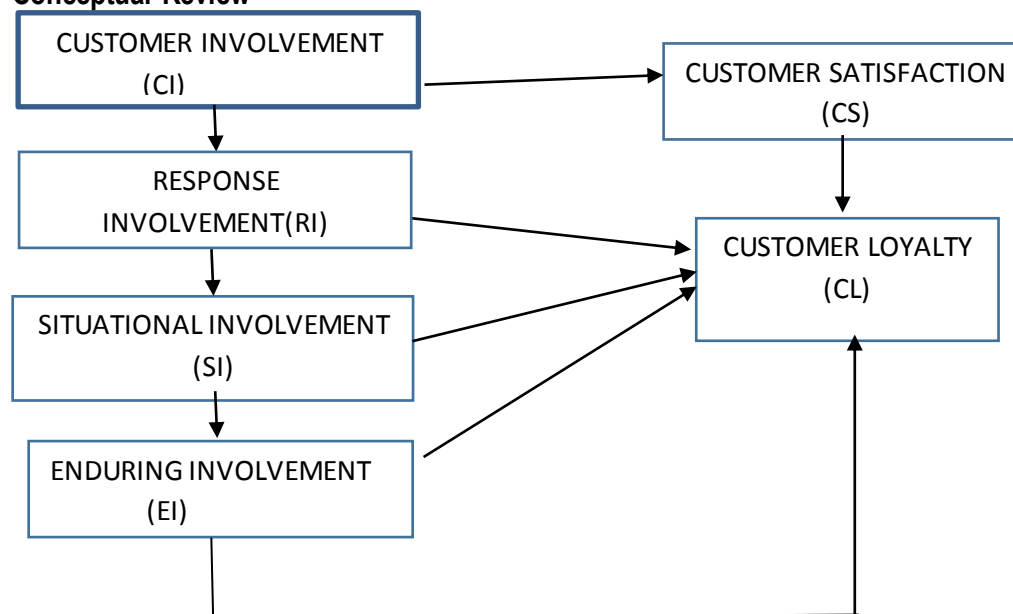
Conceptual Review of Customer Involvement Services and Customer Satisfaction.

Methodology

The study adopted explanatory research design. The study was conducted in hotels in Rivers State, Port Harcourt, Nigeria. The location was chosen because it is the most cosmopolitan city in the

whole South-South and South-East in Nigeria. A questionnaire was devised for the research to collect data. The population of the study consists of 100 customers from 10 hotels in Port Harcourt.

The study used a simple random sampling technique and Pearson's' product moment correlation coefficient to test the relationship between the variables.

Table 1: Test of Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3

Correlations

		Response Involvement	Situational Involvement	Enduring Involvement	Customer Loyalty
Response Involvement	Pearson Correlation	1	.**	.**	.729**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.	.	.000
	N	100	100	100	100
Situational Involvement	Pearson Correlation	.**	1.	.	.806**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.		.	.00
	N	100	100	100	100
Enduring Involvement	Pearson Correlation	.**	.	1	.683**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.		.000
	N	100	100	100	100
Customer Loyalty	Pearson Correlation	.729**	.806**	.683**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	100	100	100	100

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
Source: Research data, 2016

Discussion of findings
Table 1 above shows:
Pearson's' (r) = 0.729, 0.806 and 0.683 for response involvement, situational involvement, and enduring involvement in relation to customer loyalty where P-value = 0.000 (p<0.05) respectively.

The result shows that response involvement, situational involvement, and enduring involvement have strong and positive relationships with customer loyalty. The indicated that all dimensions of customer involvement positively relate with the measure of customer satisfaction. In addition, a close look at the result reveals that situational involvement had the highest correlation with customer loyalty following its relative high correlation score of 0.806.Premised on the correlation value, the study rejects the null hypotheses and accepts the alternatives, which state that there is a significant relationship with response involvement, situational involvement, enduring involvement and customer loyalty.

Conclusion
The study concluded that customer involvement has great and positive relationship with loyalty behavior of consumers among the hotel industries in Port Harcourt.

Recommendations
In view of the findings, the hotels are advised to ensure that customers' satisfaction is the bedrock of upgrading existing and or installing new customer's involvement services platforms as well as creating adequate awareness about these involvements.

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