

# Gender Perspectives on the Service Quality of Low-Cost Hotels

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**Abstract:** Service sector has recently become quite important to the global economy. The Nigerian government and numerous public sector investors are developing infrastructure and implementing sound business plans to take advantage of the hospitality industry's enormous potential in the service sector. However, due to the intense competition in the marketplace and the hospitality sector's rapid development, many businesses have felt pressure to distinguish themselves from rivals through superior customer service. Despite the level of competition among the low-cost hotels, most of the low-cost hotels in Nigeria still lack marketing concepts to attract guests. Previous studies on SERVPERF (service performance) model focused on other classes of hotels, neglecting low-cost hotels. Thus, this study analysed the SERVPERF dimensions regarding guests' satisfaction in low-cost hotels, from the demographic perspective (gender). Five undergraduate students received authorization from low-cost hotels to collect research data with the assistance of hotel employees. Each of the five survey teams consisted of a hotel employee who speaks and understands Hausa language (local language) as well as an undergraduate student from Federal University Gusau, Zamfara state, Nigeria. Data were collected from 300 guests at low-cost hotels and analysed through structural equation modelling (SEM). Composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha and average variance extracted were used to test the reliability and validity of the instrument. It was revealed that assurance positively influenced male guests' satisfaction, while reliability positively influenced female guests' satisfaction in low-cost hotels. Furthermore, assurance negatively influenced female guests' satisfaction. Male guests in low-cost hotels cherish the staff's expertise and civility, as well as their capacity to instil trust and confidence. They want the hotel employees to make them feel comfortable while the services are being provided. The study's practical implications are elucidated in this paper.

**Keywords:** SERVPERF, Guest Satisfaction, Low-Cost Hotels, Gender, SEM

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## 1. Introduction

According to statistics, the service sector—especially the hospitality sector—plays a significant role in Africa, regarding poverty reduction and jobs' creation (Christie et al., 2017). The gross domestic product (GDP) generated by the service sector in Nigeria has been on a steady increase (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2019). According to PricewaterhouseCoopers, (2019), the hotel business in Nigeria grew by 20% in 2018 and is projected to develop at a compound annual growth rate of 12% over the next five years. Evidently, the Nigerian government and numerous public sector investors are developing infrastructure and implementing sound business plans to take advantage of the hospitality industry's enormous potential (Adedipe & Adeleke, 2016; Ezeh et al., 2021). The success of hotel industry depends on guests' satisfaction. Therefore, in order to strengthen the hotel industry, hotel employees should choose possible guests through market segmentation, pinpoint their needs, and increase service quality (Ali et al., 2021; Ezeh, 2018).

For hotel employees to satisfy their customers, it is important to comprehend the needs and preferences of various market segments (Anabila et al., 2022; Ezeh, 2018; Ezeh et al., 2021; Liat et al., 2017; Zhang & Cole, 2016), even across gender. For instance, Ezeuduji *et al.*, (2014) discovered that a strong brand that addresses customers' needs will satisfy and attract customers' repeat purchase. Thus, delivering high quality service is essential to satisfy consumers and ensure the sustainability of the hotel. Due to the marketplace's intense competition and the hospitality sector's rapid development, many businesses have felt pressure to distinguish themselves from rivals in the market through superior customer service. Despite the increase in research in the area of service quality in the hospitality industry (Babić-Hodović et al., 2019; Ezeh et al., 2021; Shyju et al., 2023; Susanti, 2019), no study was found to have looked at the low-cost hotels and how they can be influenced by SERVPERF (service performance) dimensions, from gender perspective. It is still debatable if low-cost hotel guests seek for service quality. However, it has been argued that the concept of expectation is a common foundation of service quality (Paudyal et al., 2022). This rings true, as every hotel guest visits a hotel with some given expectations, for both luxury and low-cost hotels.

In order to evaluate a provider's service perception and performance, researchers created the SERVQUAL (service quality) model (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Zeithaml et al., 2018). Thus, SERVQUAL became a great

technique for assessing the services quality offered by businesses. However, Brown *et al.*, (1993) noted that SERVQUAL paradigm received harsh criticism. Therefore, many scholars evaluate customers' service quality with different models (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1996, 2014). LODGSERV (Knutson *et al.*, 1990), LODGQUAL (Getty & Thompson, 1994, 1995), and SERVPERF (Cronin & Taylor, 1992) are few examples. In order to ensure customer satisfaction, it is important to assure that actual service performance matches the level of quality the guest perceive (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988), not minding the class of the hotel. This is a big problem because it is hard to prove a connection between customer satisfaction and company's offerings. SERVQUAL and SERVPERF have been shown to be acceptable and reliable scales for assessing service quality (Carrillat *et al.*, 2007); in addition, (Carvalho & Medeiros, 2021) merged the two models to investigate airline services; and (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2011) on high education services. This led to the adoption of SERVPERF, a performance-based paradigm for this study that only analyse service quality (Cronin & Taylor, 1992, 1994). Additionally, it has been said that SERVPERF is preferable over SERVQUAL because it is a more dependable, trustworthy, and user-friendly measuring tool (Yilmaz, 2009). This paper noted that the influence of service quality on customers' satisfaction across gender, particularly at low-cost hotels, is understudied.

It is common knowledge among marketing experts that location and cultural differences have impacts on how consumers evaluate the quality of a service, hence, results from other nations or different hotel types cannot be generalized (Hsieh & Tsai, 2009; Malik *et al.*, 2020; Tsaur *et al.*, 2005). Furthermore, it has been claimed that it is still unclear if the SERVPERF scale's dimensions can be generalized (Karatepe & Avci, 2002). No scholar has recognized the significance of assessing the impact of SERVPERF on guests' satisfaction in low-cost hotels in a developing nation. Most of the low-cost hotels in Nigeria still lack marketing concepts despite the intense rivalry among them. Thus, the following research question is developed: what are the SERVPERF dimensions that influence guest satisfaction, across gender, in low-cost hotels? Accordingly, this study examines the effects of service quality and SERVPERF dimensions; and their relationships, across gender. The literature review is presented next, followed by the methodology, and finally the findings and conclusions.

## 2. Literature Review

In today's economy, which is characterized by extreme competition, service quality (SQ) has become essential for business survival (Ezeh *et al.*, 2021; Ezeuduji *et al.*, 2014; Kandampully *et al.*, 2011). Service quality has become a recurrent theme in modern literature and business practice. Service quality has been connected to a number of advantages, including customer satisfaction and retention, positive word-of-mouth, increased productivity, increased market share, improved employee morale, and higher profitability (Chatterjee *et al.*, 2023; Shyju *et al.*, 2023). Many studies in the hospitality industry have revealed a substantial correlation between service quality and customer satisfaction (Anabila *et al.*, 2022). Thus, increasing customer satisfaction is the only way hotels can prosper. According to Parasuraman *et al.*, (1991), customer satisfaction is the guest's evaluation of their service expectations based on the actual execution of the service both before and after they receive it. According to several studies, guests who are satisfied with the hotel's services are more inclined to repeat purchase (H.-H. (Sunny) Hu *et al.*, 2009; Kandampully *et al.*, 2015; Kandampully & Hu, 2007; Wai Lai, 2019). Practitioners and academics concur that customer satisfaction and service quality are necessary for repeat purchase (Chatterjee *et al.*, 2023).

SERVQUAL scales for assessing service quality was developed by (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985, 1988). SERVQUAL has a broad applicability across disciplines and contexts, which gives birth to its main claim of adaptability (Ali *et al.*, 2021; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985). Despite its benefits, Cronin and Taylor, (1994) caution that the SERVQUAL's original formulation may not sufficiently account for contextual variables, necessitating some context-specific modifications to increase its contribution. In line with this, academics frequently accept the five scale of SERVQUAL, and modify the variables to account for the unique characteristics of the scenario. The hospitality sector has seen the establishment of many sector-specific frameworks, including LODSERV (Knutson *et al.*, 1990), LODGQUAL (Getty & Thompson, 1994, 1995), and SERVPERF (Cronin & Taylor, 1992). Thus, SERVQUAL (service quality) and SERVPERF (service performance) have been the most widely used scales for service quality assessment in the services marketing literature (Anabila *et al.*, 2022).

Visitors' expectations were therefore not considered while evaluating the quality of the services; only aspects of consumer perceptions are employed for this study. A number of academics have underlined that it is challenging and useless to examine expectations when evaluating service quality (Yilmaz, 2009). Therefore, SERVPERF is used to explain customers' satisfaction in low-cost hotels as well as the moderating role of gender. The elements SERVPERF were condensed to five (assurance, empathy, reliability, tangibles, and responsiveness) in order to increase the psychometric robustness of the test (Cronin & Taylor, 1994; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988; Yilmaz, 2009).

*Tangibles* refers to cues that guests physically notice at the service centre, such as contemporary equipment, tidy and professional look of employees, the presence of aesthetically appealing items linked with the service. *Reliability* refers to consumers' faith in workers to deliver services in line with the promise made; offer services correctly the first time and on schedule. *Responsiveness* refers to the willingness and promptness with which a service provider provides service and assistance to consumers. *Assurance* refers to staff's expertise and civility, as well as their capacity to instil trust and confidence in clients. *Empathy* refers to the personalized attention that the service centre provides to its consumers. It involves staff's personal contacts with customers, with the customer's best interests in mind. All these SERVPERF dimensions above were explained by (Cronin & Taylor, 1994; Parasuraman et al., 1988). Despite several attempts to measure and explain the factors that affect customer satisfaction in hospitality industry, scholars do not seem to agree (Ahmad et al., 2019; Ezeh et al., 2021). Moreover, every hotel types make every effort to satisfy their guests because it is more expensive to acquire new customers than to retain existing ones (Kotler et al., 2022).

Hotel key drivers differ significantly depending on the context or the class of the hotel. Thus, adventure, thrills, excitement, solitude, social interaction, culture, relaxation, and fulfilment are some of the frequently reported motivation dimensions that may moderate the factors that influence customers satisfaction (Chatterjee et al., 2023; Park et al., 2023). Also, according to Shyju *et al.*, (2023), demographic traits affect customers' perceptions of businesses and their choices to buy particular services. Thus, this study examined the moderating effects of gender on the relationship between satisfaction and SERVPERF dimensions in low-cost hotels. Thus, we hypothesized as follows.

H1: The relationship between tangibility and low-cost hotel guests' satisfaction differs across gender.

H2: The relationship between reliability and low-cost hotel guests' satisfaction differs across gender.

H3: The relationship between responsiveness and low-cost hotel guests' satisfaction differs across gender.

H4: The relationship between assurance and low-cost hotel guests' satisfaction differs across gender.

H5: The relationship between empathy and low-cost hotel guests' satisfaction differs across gender.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design and Data Collection**

Customers of low-cost hotels in northwest Nigeria, were the target population. Hotels with rooms' rates ranging from eight thousand naira (₦8000.00) to three thousand naira (₦3000.00), that is \$19 to \$7 per night, are considered low-cost hotels in this study. Over the period of four months, a self-administered questionnaire was used to collect information from 300 hotel guests. Five undergraduate students received authorization from hotels in advance to collect data with the assistance of hotel employees. Each of the five survey teams consisted of a hotel employee who speaks and understands Hausa language, the local language, as well as an undergraduate student from Federal University Gusau, Zamfara state. Those who can speak Hausa were included in the team, in case of guests that do not understand English language. Hotel visitors were conveniently requested to complete questionnaires upon checking out.

#### **3.2 Variables and Measurement**

SERVPERF scale was adapted from several authors (Babić-Hodović et al., 2019; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Nasir & Adil, 2020), while customer satisfaction and customer loyalty variables came from (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2002). The data were gathered using a structured questionnaire, graded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The questionnaire items were assessed by three academics with expertise in hospitality marketing, and seven hotel workers before a pretest with hotel guests to ensure content validity. Thereafter, a full-scale study was conducted.

### **4. Results**

#### **4.1 Reliability and Validity Analyses**

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were conducted to assess the measurement validity and reliability of the model. EFA was conducted using maximum likelihood analysis with Promax rotation, KMO was 0.867 ( $p < 0.001$ ), which was more than the indicated value (Field, 2013; Pallant,

2020). Thus, all elements are sufficient for the factor analysis (Hair et al., 2019). All the indices indicated that the variables showed significant internal consistency (Hair et al., 2019; Pallant, 2020). As shown in Table 1, CFA was used to assess the items' validity and reliability. The six factors were retained and their individual loadings are more than 0.70, which is appropriate (Hair et al., 2014). Additionally, because the initial models did not meet the model fit criteria, model improvement using modification indices was carried out. Thus, factors with high modification indices were removed (Collier, 2020). Following model improvement, the following model indices demonstrate that the model's fit criteria have been satisfied: Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.947, Incremental Fit Index (IFI) = 0.948, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = 0.936, and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.079 (Collier, 2020; L. Hu & Bentler, 1999). Furthermore, the entire model fit produced a chi-square of 422.458 with 155 degrees of freedom ( $p < 0.001$ ). The relative/normed Chi-Square ratio is 2.726. Thus, the proper range is met (Hair et al., 2019; Hair Jr et al., 2010). Additionally, discriminant validity testing was done on the structural model. As shown in Table 1, the average variance extracted (AVE) of each measurement varied from 0.653 to 0.914, exceeding 50% of variance (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Also, Cronbach's alphas for reliability for the six components were above the stipulated level of 0.70 (Field, 2013; Hair et al., 2019). The fact that the AVE for each construct was greater than the squared correlation coefficients for the linked inter-constructs demonstrates sufficient discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), as can be seen in Table 2.

**Table 1:**

<b>Confirmatory factor Analysis</b>					
<b>Items</b>		<b>Estimate</b>	<b>CR</b>	<b>AVE</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>
<b>Responsiveness</b>	RESP6	0.977	0.977	0.914	0.977
	RESP5	0.990			
	RESP1	0.960			
	RESP4	0.895			
<b>Empathy</b>	EMPA4	0.942	0.878	0.708	0.868
	EMPA2	0.853			
	EMPA5	0.713			
<b>Tangibility</b>	TANG2	0.869	0.903	0.653	0.900
	TANG4	0.827			
	TANG3	0.891			
	TANG1	0.796			
	TANG6	0.632			
<b>Assurance</b>	ASSU1	0.775	0.870	0.691	0.867
	ASSU4	0.879			
	ASSU3	0.838			
<b>Reliability</b>	RELI3	0.792	0.889	0.728	0.878
	RELI4	0.922			
	RELI1	0.842			
<b>Satisfaction</b>	SATI3	0.860	0.924	0.859	0.919
	SATI4	0.989			

**Table 2:**

<b>Fornell and locker criterion of discriminants validity</b>										
<b>Items</b>	<b>CR</b>	<b>AVE</b>	<b>MSV</b>	<b>MaxR(H)</b>	<b>RESP</b>	<b>EMPA</b>	<b>TANG</b>	<b>ASSU</b>	<b>RELI</b>	<b>SATI</b>
<b>RESP</b>	0.977	0.914	0.280	0.989	<b>0.956</b>					
<b>EMPA</b>	0.878	0.708	0.258	0.921	0.323	<b>0.842</b>				
<b>TANG</b>	0.903	0.653	0.367	0.920	0.303	0.508	<b>0.808</b>			

Items	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	RESP	EMPA	TANG	ASSU	RELI	SATI
<b>ASSU</b>	0.870	0.691	0.367	0.879	0.497	0.460	0.606	<b>0.832</b>		
<b>RELI</b>	0.889	0.728	0.297	0.907	0.529	0.385	0.447	0.532	<b>0.853</b>	
<b>SATI</b>	0.924	0.859	0.297	0.979	0.397	0.300	0.281	0.357	0.545	<b>0.927</b>

#### 4.2 Structural Equation Model (SEM) Path Analysis

The influence of SERVPER dimensions on satisfaction across gender are investigated using SEM. Table 3 shows that assurance ( $\beta = 0.494, p < 0.00$ ) has significant influence on male guests' satisfaction, while responsiveness, empathy, reliability and tangibility have no significant influence on male guests' satisfaction. Table 4 shows that reliability ( $\beta = 0.602, p < 0.00$ ) has significant influence on female guests' satisfaction; and assurance ( $\beta = -0.274, p < 0.05$ ) has negative and significant influence on female guests' satisfaction.

**Table 3:**

Male Path Coefficient						
Paths		Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Remark
SATI <---	RESP	0.051	0.067	0.585	0.558	Not Supported
SATI <---	EMPA	0.132	0.054	1.538	0.124	Not Supported
SATI <---	TANG	-0.033	0.078	-0.356	0.722	Not Supported
SATI <---	ASSU	0.494	0.128	3.79	***	<b>Supported</b>
SATI <---	RELI	0.127	0.076	1.209	0.227	Not Supported

**Table 4:**

Female Path Coefficient						
		Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
SATI <---	RESP	0.084	0.080	0.794	0.427	Not Supported
SATI <---	EMPA	0.060	0.098	0.603	0.546	Not Supported
SATI <---	TANG	0.106	0.143	0.800	0.424	Not Supported
SATI <---	ASSU	-0.274	0.145	-2.216	0.027	<b>Supported</b>
SATI <---	RELI	0.602	0.129	4.758	***	<b>Supported</b>

### 5. Discussion

SERVPERF was used to evaluate guests' satisfaction across gender in low-cost hotels. It was revealed that assurance influences male guests' satisfaction, while reliability influences female guests' satisfaction in low-cost hotels. Furthermore, assurance negatively influences female guests' satisfaction. Male guests in low-cost hotels cherish the staff's expertise and civility, as well as their capacity to instil trust and confidence. They want the hotel employees to make them feel comfortable while the services are being provided. This study is in tandem with other scholars' finding (Meesala & Paul, 2018; Namin, 2017), although they studied all hotel types' guests. It shows that guests are satisfied with low-cost hotels that deliver on service promised. Agreeably, there is no significant relationship between tangibility and guests' satisfaction for both male and female guests. Thus, low-cost hotels' guests do not care much about the low-cost hotels' physical environment. This study is in line with other scholars' finding that tangibility does not significantly influence satisfaction (Meesala & Paul, 2018; Mey et al., 2006). The focus of this present study is on low-cost hotels that may not care much about professionalism, and that might be the reason for that conflicting finding between males and females. Notably, empathy, tangibility, and responsiveness do not influence guests' satisfaction. No scholar was found to have divested low-cost hotels' service quality into dimensions, to test them across gender, as this study has done.

#### 5.1 Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this study was to predict the influence of SERVPERF dimensions on low-cost hotels' guest satisfaction across gender (male and female guests). The study's findings suggest some implications for hotel

management. The result shows that low-cost hotel staff should emphasize more on assurance to male guests, and reliability to female guests to satisfy guests and make them to repeat purchase. Low-cost hotels are mostly one-man owned businesses and may not have enough capital to beautify and professionalize some of the services delivered by these hotels. The SERVPERF scale clearly provides hotel management with critical data for designing quality improvement initiatives and gaining competitive advantage.

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