Factors Influencing Customers' Loyalty to Selected Hotels in Suleja Metropolis Niger State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study of customer loyalty has ever remained a prime concern for business organizations. Customers' satisfactions or otherwise and relationship, product image and trustworthiness of an organization were shown depending on customer loyalty. This study examines the factors influencing customers' loyalty to selected hotels in Suleja Metropolis, Niger State. Primary data were collected from the selected hotels in the study area. Questionnaire and interview guides were the instruments used for the collection of these data. The questionnaire was used to gather data from the lodgers in the hotels while the interview schedule was used for Hotel Managers who were the key informants in the study. A total of 120 respondents were involved in the quantitative survey, each with a copy of the questionnaire, but at the end of the exercise, only 112 questionnaires were retrieved for analysis; 5 Key Informants were also involved for qualitative data. Findings showed the range of services being enjoyed within the study settings. Very prominent among these services is accommodation (52.8%). The services being provided by these hotels were rated as excellent (58.1%), quality of food was equally rated favourably (78.6%). Factors that informed customers' loyalty include maximum satisfaction derived from the services (21.4%), esthetic (beauty) value of the place (36.6%). The study, thus, affirmed that customers' loyalty encourages repeated purchases of services and build customers' emotional attachment to the establishment.

Keywords: Quality Service, Hospitality, Customer Loyalty, Hotels, Nigeria

Introduction

The hospitality industry is an entrepreneurial environment whose aims are to provide comfortable, suitable accommodation and safe catering services (Brotherton and Wood 2000). The services include safe foods and drinks in a friendly hospitable and pleasing manner to whosoever needs such provisions.

Examples of hospitality industries are Hotels, Motels, and Guesthouses, Catering establishment, Restaurant and Bars, Hospital and health centres. The hospitality industry also provides ancillary services such as entertainment, car hire services or other e-mail services, recreational services, laundry services and security services (Brotherton, 2000). However, it is to be noted that all the aforementioned services have to be paid for. The survival of any of these hospitality outfits is based on regular patronage which itself shows the customers' loyalty to the outfits(s).

Loyalty as a social concept is widely accepted by marketers as beings something that worth nurturing with many renowned analysts and researchers repeatedly showing the value of loyalty Programmes in terms of greater spending and satisfaction, more profitable customers behaviour reduced defection levels, and unique competitive advantages (Gronholdt, Marktensen and Kristensen, 2000).

Recent years have shown a growing interest in customer loyalty. The globalization of competition, a saturation of markets, and the development of information technology have enhanced customer awareness and created a situation where long term success is no longer achieved through optimized product, price and qualities. Instead, companies build their success on a long-term customer's relationship. According to former studies, it can cost as much as 6 times more to win a new customer than it does to keep to an existing one. Depending on the particular industry, it is possible to increase profit by up to 60% after reducing potential migration by 5% hence, we can see that the increase and reflection of loyal customers have become a key factor for the long term success of the companies. The main emphasis in marketing has shifted from winning new customer to the retentions of existing one (Khairawati 2020, Blal *et al.,* 2018, Effler, 2017).

Customers' loyalty is of prime importance for business organizations. Some researchers (Gremler and Brown, 1996, Gould, 1995, Hafeez and Hasnu, 2010, Abbas, Khalid, Azam and Riaz*,* 2010) have investigated the nature of different levels of loyalty; others have explored the influence of individual factors on loyalty. In most of their findings, the roles of customers' satisfaction, and relationship, production, age and trustworthiness of hospitality organisations were severally highlighted to buttress their points (Waari *et al.,* 2018, Raji and Zainal, 2017, Srivastava, 2016). The long-term success and sustainable reputation of an organization were equally shown depending on customer loyalty. Equally significant are customers' relationship and satisfaction that are noted as leading factors for organizations 'competitive business environment (Kang, 2019, Kim, 2018, Kim *et al.,* 2018). As beautiful as the foregoing seems,

very little literature exists on customers' loyalty to the industries in Nigeria (Dimfwina 2018). In other societies most especially in European and Asia countries, lots of academic works have been done in view of the promising nature of the hospitality industry in Nigeria, this study aims at examining the factors that influence the customers' loyalty to selected hotels in the Suleja metropolis, Niger State.

Objectives of the Study
The objectives generated to guide this study for meaningful findings included to:
1. Identify services provided by these hotels.
2. Find out the customers opinion of the services provided.
3. Examine what customers' loyalty is all about.
4. Document the factors that informs the customers' patronage, and
5. Examine the effects of the services on customers' loyalty.

Methodology
These involved primary and secondary sources; the primary sources are the use of Questionnaire and Interview Guide while the secondary sources are the use of library materials search of existing literature. Out of 20 hotels identified within the Suleja metropolis, 10 were randomly sampled. From each of these hotels, a total of 12 respondents were randomly sampled. Because of the security situation in the country, the respondents were sampled with the support of the managers of the hotels where they lodged through a systematic random sampling method. Where a respondent sampled could not participate, another volunteer who desires to take part was used in the selection, as a replacement. A total of one hundred and twenty (120) respondents were involved as the study population but only 112 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved for analysis. Data generated were analyzed by making use of frequency and simple percentages. The qualitative data obtained during the interview sessions were subjected to content analysis. The results were interpreted with verbatim quotations to (in)validate the quantitative data collected through the questionnaire.

Findings
Table 1 shows that the male constituted 56% while the female constituted 43%. In terms of age, those that are less than 30 years of age constituted 61.6%. Those between 30 – 50 years are 31.3% and those who are above 50 years were 7.1%. While the religious affiliations are as follow: Christianity constituted 65.2%, Islam constituted 29.5% while traditional religion constituted the remaining 5.3%; 44.7% of the people that knows about the existence of this

hotel know it through friends, 30.3% know about it through advertisement, while 25% knew about it through the staffs of those hotels. The data reveals that 6.3% has no formal education; 8.1% had primary school education, 7.1% had secondary school education, 40.2% had ND/NCE, while 38.3% had HND and University Degree. The marital status of the respondents shows that the single constituted 51.8%, the married constituted 38.4%, divorced constituted 4.5%, those that are separated constituted 3.6% while the widowed constituted 1.7%. Also, 26.8% of the respondents are traders, 28.6% are teachers; 18.8% are students while 25.8% are civil servants.

Customers patronizing these hotels 25.9% constituted those that visited for their first time, 26.8% constituted those patronizing the hotel for up to two (2) years, 33.9% constituted customers patronizing the hotel for up to five (5) years while 13.4% constituted customers patronizing the hotel for more than five (5) years (see, Table 2). Respondents source of income from all source of last month and these are ₦ 5,000 – ₦ 10,000 (15.2%); ₦ 11,000 – ₦ 20,000 (14.3%); ₦ 21,000 – ₦ 30,000 (19.6%); ₦ 31,000 – ₦ 40,000 (14.3%); And above ₦ 41,000 (36.6%). The service obtainable; 9.8% constituted catering service, 1.8% constituted car hiring, 65.2% constituted Accommodation, 12.5% constituted laundry service, while the remaining 10.7% constituted Bar and Restaurant Service.

About 32.2% of the respondents were motivated by their good customers' relationship another 22.3% were motivated by the neatness of the environment while only 19.6 were motivated by their trustworthiness (see Table 3). Further data show the services best enjoyed by the respondents as customers of the hotel include catering service (11.6%), accommodation (52.85%), laundry service (22.8%), bar and restaurant service (13.3%). The customers rated these services as very excellent (23.2%), excellent (58.1%), manageable (11.6%), and fair (7.1%).

Table 4 reveals the rating of service in the hotels in terms of cleanliness across the sections like dining area (72.3%), public area (63.3%), bathroom (59.8%), other public areas (58.1%) and bedroom (64.3%). The satisfaction derived from the use of bedrooms, bathrooms, service and efficiency as well as food quality in the selected hotels were reflected through the ratings given to them. Virtually every unit within these sections was given high ratings by these respondents (see table 4).

Services and Customers' Loyalty

This section explored, the relationship between services being rendered and customers' loyalty. The Key informants who were the Hotels Manager provided information for the understanding of this issue. In the course of this, what is known as Customers' loyalty was discussed in the interview sessions. According to one of them:

> *Customer loyalty denotes the ability for repeated patronage of a hotel due to satisfaction of the previous patronage. Loyalty is a product of conviction about the value being gotten for the money spent in the course of patronage. In the course of this, consistent patronage implies the belief of the customers in an establishment that is providing certain services her/she is purchasing; this further shows that the nature of services being provided determines how loyal a customer is to that establishment (In-depth Interview/Hotel Manager 'A'/Suleja Metropolis, 15/06/2019).*

It was further revealed by another respondent that:

> *Loyalty may include discounted services but not solely based on the discounts being given in the course of patronage. However, a discount is always given when the establishment discovered that a particular customer is being consistent in patronage. Such discount thus becomes the instrument by which loyalty is being 'cemented' for a sustainable relationship. Another issue that is paramount and unarguably the foundation upon which other efforts to secure customers' loyalty stands is accessibility to hotels and affordability of services being provided is central in the process of securing customers' loyalty (In-depth Interview/Hotel Manager 'B'/Suleja Metropolis, 16/04/2019).*

The participants in interview sessions submitted further that:

> *Every hotel always struggles to attain is to attract the customers' loyalty for unalloyed supports. The idea of loyalty customers has for a hotel, therefore, become significant when the customer is able to convince others of the need for the patronage of that hotel. So, every management of the hotel will do everything that is legally binding to secure the utmost loyalty of old and new customers in order to remain afloat in business (In-depth Interview/Hotel Manager 'A'/Suleja Metropolis, 15/04/2019).*

Effects of the services being provided on customer's patronage were rated in relation to hospitality and friendliness, dining rooms and restaurants, the exterior of the hotels as well as all public areas of the hotels. According to the data presented, table 5, shows that 80.4% of the respondents rated the hospitability and friendliness of these hotels as very good, 14.3% rated it as good while 5.3% rated it as moderate. This table reveals that 67.9% of the respondents rated these services (dining room and restaurant) as very good, 19.66% as good, while 12.5% rated them as moderate. The table further showed 73.2% of the respondents rating the exterior of the hotel as very good, 20.5%

rate it as good, while 6.3% rating it as moderate. This table father shows that 84.8% of the respondents rated the public areas of the hotel as very good, 10.7% rate it as good, while the remaining 4.5% constituted those that rated it as moderate.

Effects of Services provided on customers' loyalty
For objective reports, information on the effects of services being rendered on customers' loyalty was sought through Key Informants. Data generated, therefore, shed light on issues pertaining to this:

> *There is consistency in patronage from the customers. There is no gainsaying there; every customer will go for the establishment that is able to meet up with his/her expectations. This decision about this is usually based on the previous experience of these customers about the way such hotels served them last. Therefore, better services have led to a high level of loyalty from customers in terms of patronage in this hotel (In-depth Interview/Hotel Manager 'C'/Suleja Metropolis, 16/04/2019).*

Another participant revealed that:

> *As one of the satellite towns to Federal Capital Territory, Suleja is in a strategic position with a high influx of visitors/tourists on regular basis; it is now left to every hotel Manager to convince these customers of his ability to meet their needs. In this hotel, we have never disappointed our customers, because we have been receiving a high level of patronage, which has led to an increase in income generation which subsequently translated to financial capability for an improved service for better loyalty (In-depth Interview/Hotel Manager 'D'/Suleja Metropolis, 18/04/2019).*

It was further revealed that:

> *The quest for customers loyalty has made them available (hotel) market very competitive and for every hotel in the community to be functional in terms of service provision. So, any hotel you found functional for up to 5 to 10 years is that one that has recognized, adopted and consistently adhering to this 'golden rule'. So, it is a crime not to serve customers best, because it will lead to disloyalty on the part of the customers and invariably an invitation to bankruptcy (In-depth Interview/Hotel Manager 'E'/Suleja Metropolis, 17/04/2019).*

Discussion
The analysis revealed that improved hospitality service in order to meet customers' satisfaction is a must for any hospitality outfit to succeed and gain patronage in the midst of numerous competitors who are ready to make use of any marking tools to attract the consumer and potential tourist to their outlets. Hotels industries have been engaging in the rendering of services to tourist expectations in order to create an exciting memory for the tourist and also serve as a motivating factor that will make them be loyal to the industry. Thus, the impact of good service delivery and quality service is not farfetched as this has

increased and improved customers' patronage, which also translated to their ability to remain relevant within the industry.

Various services provided by these hotels are accommodation, catering service, laundry service, restaurant, and bar and so on. Customers opinion on the services provided are also noted \rated as excellent, while these were variously rated as very good, good, and manageably and recommendations were made to improve these services.

Customers' loyalty revealed as including the ability for repeated patronage of a hotel due to satisfaction of the previous patronage, the utmost marks every hotel always struggle to attain is to attract the customers' loyalty for unalloyed supports. Factors that inform the customers' patronage was also documented as maximum satisfaction derived from the services; aesthetic (beauty) of the place, good ratings of the available facilities and services, Hospitability and aesthetic values and general cleanliness. This result is coherent with the position of Agu, Kalu and Agaeze (2017) on the image of the restaurants, which could be interpreted in terms of aesthetic and environmental values among others as a factor in the sustenance of customers' patronage to the hospitality industry.

The effects of the services on customers' loyalty were also examined and found to be manifesting through better service, which has led to a high level of loyalty from customers in terms of patronage. This position corroborates the earlier submission of Ahmad, Ahmed, Nawaz, Usman, Shaukat and Ahmad (2010) that an excellent service offered by the personnel to a customer enhances customer loyalty, customer retention and patronage.

The high level of patronage has led to an increase in income generation which subsequently translated to the financial capability that subsequently translated to financial capability for an improved service for better loyalty. The finding thus aligns with the outcome of a study by Olise, Okoli and Ekeke (2015) where it was affirmed that customer loyalty increases the customers' patronage and consequently leading to an increase in the profitability of the firm. Within this background, the fact that cannot be denied is that the survival of any hotel outfit is predicated on regular patronage. It is through this that the loyalty of the customer to hotels is known. This is not a strange phenomenon since customers' loyalty is widely accepted by marketers as being something that's worth nurturing with many renowned analysts and researchers repeatedly showing the value of loyalty programmes in terms of greater spending and satisfaction, more profitable customers' behaviour, reduced defection levels, and unique competitive advantages.

Recommendations

Going by the results of this study, it is an indisputable fact that these hotels were experiencing reasonable patronage; the patronage is noted as being the product of the quiet nature of the location and good facilities available in these hotels. The general picture of the finding is a modest operation with a robust outcome. Despite this and given few challenges noted, the following recommendations were made for improved service delivery.

1. The employment of the experienced staff is also an essential factor that the management needs to consider when offering a job in a vacant position in the hotel outfit because through their knowledge and experience they will be able to handle customers' request more efficiently. The management of these hotels should ensure that they engage their staff in either monthly, quarterly or yearly training or course in other to learn new prospect and also perfect their ability to discharge their duties more effectively and efficiently.

2. Provision of adequate facilities is needed for the hospitability service providers to run their business smoothly and those facilities should be structured to meet customers' satisfaction.

3. Provision of incentive, this can be done in many ways, such as given discount in services enjoyed, price reduction charged, awarding gift to customers etc. customers expectation and satisfaction can be sustained when these demands are successfully met or provided.

4. The industry should give respect to every customer whether he/she is new or old. A humble and respected attitude towards customer builds the images of the company in return.

5. The industry should always remain alert to take appropriate measures to enhance customers' satisfaction and relationship and product image, and trustworthiness. Results of this study show the highest correlation of customer loyalty with customer relationship and satisfaction.

Conclusion

This study has succeeded in providing information on factors that influence customers' loyalty. Going by the research outcome from the selected hotels in Suleja metropolis of Niger State, Nigeria, it was obvious that the management teams in the hotel understood what it takes to win customers' loyalty. The understanding of this manifested in the quality of services being provided to the customers. The fear of losing the customers to other competitors must have informed the constant provision of excellent quality food through the personnel that were affirmed as capable. The aesthetic value of the environment under which these hotels were operating equally added to the constant display of

loyalty and patronage by the customers. In line with the foregoing, it was apparent that customers have been identified as very vulnerable and can easily switch to other brands or hospitality outfits as they have a lot of options to choose from. Thus, management teams as a matter of duty, need to anchor their activities on the fact that making customers loyal to the company means not only to encourage them to make repeat purchases but also to build customers' emotional attachment to their establishment.

Acknowledgement

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Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Socio-demographic Characteristics		Frequency N=112	Percentage
Sex	Male	63	56.3
	Female	49	43.7
Age Category	Less than 30 years	69	61.6
	From 30 to 50 years	35	31.3
	Above 50 years	08	7.1
Religious Affiliation	Christianity	73	65.2
	Islam	33	29.5
	Traditional religion	06	5.3
Sources of Information of the Hotel	Friends	50	44.7
	Staff members of the Hotel	28	25.0
	Adverts	34	30.3
Education	Pre-primary education	07	6.3
	Primary School	09	8.1
	Secondary School	08	7.1
	ND/NCE	45	40.2
	HND/University degree	43	38.3
Marital Status	Single	58	51.8
	Married	43	38.4
	Divorced	05	4.5
	Separated	04	3.6
	Widowed	02	1.7
Occupation	Trading	30	26.8
	Teaching	32	28.6
	Student	21	18.8
	Civil Service	29	25.8

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 2: Duration of Patronage, Income and Services provided by the Hotels

Variables	Responses	Frequency N=112	Percentage
Duration of Patronage	This is my first time	29	25.9
	1 – 2 years	30	26.8
	3 – 5 years	38	33.9
	More than 5 years	15	13.4
Income from all sources	₦ 5000 - 10,000	17	15.2
	₦11,000 - 20,000	16	14.3
	₦ 21,000 - 30,000	22	19.6
	₦ 31,000 - 40,000	16	14.3
	Above ₦41,000	41	36.6
Services Provided by the Hotels	Catering service	11	9.8
	Car hiring	02	1.8
	Accommodation	73	65.2
	Laundry service	14	12.5
	Bar & restaurant	12	10.7

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 3: Factors that encourage customers' patronage

Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Quantity Service	36	32.2
Good Customers Relationship	29	25.9
Neatness of the Environment	25	22.3
Trust Worthiness	22	19.6
Total	**112**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 4: Rating of services

Rating Cleanliness	Very Good (%)	Good (%)	Moderate (%)	Fair (%)
Dining area	72.3	23.2	4.5	-
Public area	63.3	28.6	8.1	-
Bathroom	59.8	31.3	8.9	-
Other public area	58.1	31.2	10.7	-
Bedroom	64.3	25.0	10.7	-
Bedrooms				
Decoration	73.2	11.6	8.1	7.1
Furniture, fitting & ventilation	75.9	12.5	8.9	2.7
Flooring	66.9	22.3	6.3	4.5
Beds and bedding	58.0	26.8	9.8	5.4
Lighting, heating & ventilation	55.3	25.9	15.2	3.6
Bedroom accessories	52.7	23.2	13.4	10.7
Space, comfort & ease of use	57.8	24.1	16.1	8.6
Bathrooms				
Decoration	69.6	12.5	14.3	3.6
Fixture and fitting	68.7	16.1	13.3	1.9
Flooring	63.4	23.2	10.7	2.7
Lighting, heating & ventilation	66.9	18.8	8.9	5.4
Towels and toiletries	58.0	26.8	8.1	7.1
Space, comfort & ease of use	55.4	24.1	12.5	8.0
Service and Efficiency				
Booking service	77.7	11.6	8.9	1.8
Arrival service	74.1	15.2	10.7	-
Lounge service	74.1	9.8	16.1	-
Bar service	71.4	17.9	10.7	-
Other service (leisure etc)	66.9	18.8	12.5	1.8
Departure service	62.5	16.9	16.1	4.5
Restaurant service	53.6	21.4	25.0	-
Restaurant, wine and drink	49.1	23.2	24.1	3.6
Breakfast service	40.2	28.6	25.9	5.3
Room service	58.1	22.3	19.6	-
Food Quality				
Dinner choice	78.6	14.3	7.1	-
Dinner quantity	81.3	10.7	8.0	-
Room service	71.5	19.6	8.9	-
Breakfast choice	66.1	17.8	16.1	-
Breakfast quantity	62.5	22.3	15.2	-

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 5: Ratings on the effects of service on Patronage

Hospitality& Neatness	Very Good (%)	Good (%)	Moderate (%)	Fair (%)
Booking service	77.1	15.2	7.1	-
Arrival service	75.9	16.9	7.2	-
Lounge Service	75.8	13.4	9.8	-
Bar Service	80.4	14.3	5.3	-
Other public area (leisure etc)	75.0	16.1	8.9	-
Departure service	66.9	21.5	11.6	-
Room service	64.3	24.1	11.6	-
Restaurant service	67.9	18.7	13.4	-
Breakfast service	57.1	26.8	16.1	-
Dining Room & Restaurant				
Decoration	80.4	11.6	8.0	-
Furniture, fitting & ventilation	74.2	16.9	8.9	-
Flooring	67.9	19.6	12.5	-
Lighting, heating & ventilation	58.0	27.7	14.3	-
Table appointment	55.4	18.7	25.9	-
Space, comfort & ease of use	43.8	29.5	26.7	-
Exterior				
Building and appearance	73.2	20.5	6.3	3.6
Grounds, garden & frontage	66.9	22.4	10.7	-
Car packing	53.6	31.3	15.1	-
Leisure	50.0	25.9	24.1	-
All Public Areas				
Decoration	84.8	10.7	4.5	-
Furniture, fitting & ventilation	73.2	17.9	8.9	-
Flooring	66.9	21.5	11.6	-
Lighting, heating & ventilation	58.6	27.7	14.3	-
Space, comfort & ease of use	47.3	31.3	21.4	-
Stairs, corridors, hallway	41.9	32.2	25.9	-

Source: Field Survey, 2019

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