



doi 10.5281/zenodo.8418979

Vol. 06 Issue 10 Oct - 2023

Manuscript ID: #1038

E-RESERVATION AND GUEST SATISFACTION IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study was carried out primarily to investigate the relationship between e-reservation and guest satisfaction in the hospitality industry in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to; Ascertain the relationship between e-reservation and repeat patronage and brand loyalty respectively of hotel guests in Rivers State, Nigeria. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of study was large and unknown. Consequently, the sample size of 246 determined using Freund and Williams formula for sample size determination from a infinite population. Primary data was utilized in the study. Primary data were collected a well structured questionnaire and administered to the guests of hotel organizations in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The questionnaire was validated through face, and content validity. The internal consistency of the instrument was excellent (.991) using Chronbach Alpha. Statistical tools for data analyses included descriptive analysis and Pearson' Product Moment Correlation. The study therefore concluded that acquiring e-business infrastructure is essential for hotels that want to enhance guest satisfaction. Major findings showed that e-reservation had positive significant relationship with guest satisfaction. It was recommended that The owners/managers of hotels should take advantage of the e-business revolution by investing in it in order not to loose customers to competitors, only modern ICT infrastructure should be used to empower the e-business operations, hotel owners should employ competent staff that are ICT compliant, and appropriate training and development programmes should be initiated to update the skills of the old staff

KEYWORDS

E-Reservation. Guest Satisfaction. Repeat Patronage. Brand Loyalty.



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Introduction

With rapid growth of the Internet and the globalization of markets, organisations are adopting new Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the performance of their activities, not only to support traditional activities, but also to support those arising from new opportunities, mainly from the Internet. The hotel industry is not left out in this era of innovativeness aimed at enhancing hotel operations and management. Electronic commerce and online business stand out among these opportunities. Most companies are establishing websites, which are regarded as a new channel to conduct business transaction, and customers can make purchase through companies' Websites. It enables companies to access a global market with low operating cost, to offer information in depth, and to provide customers electronic service (e-service) with superior quality by means of the interactivity of the Internet, which increases the competition among companies.

Customer satisfaction is the most studied concepts in marketing research, and is attributable to its ability to engender positive behavioural intentions such as brand loyalty, repeat purchase, positive word of mouth communication, (Mohsan, et al 2011). Customer satisfaction describes the overall behaviour or attitude towards a brand or organisation. It is also emotional reaction of a customer towards a brand or organisation based on the perceived difference between prior customers' expectation and what is received with regard to fulfilment of needs, desire or goal (Hansemark & Albinsson, 2004; Kotler, 2000). Brand loyalty is a deep-rooted commitment to continue using a particular product, buy from a particular supplier due to the value they receive from using such a product or from the organisation (Anderson & Jacobsen, 2000). The application of ICT in the hospitality industry has the capacity to enhance customer satisfaction.

With the increasing competition in the hospitality industry/business which is getting tougher, ICT application in operations marketing and management and consumer experience remain an effective marketing strategy in providing real time services and satisfaction to their target audience and this can encourage consumer repurchase interest and promote brand loyalty (Winarno, & Dewi, 2023). Electronic operations management in the hospitality industry is a source of opportunities and challenges to owners and managers of tourism and hospitality businesses (Wang, et al 2014) and has succeeded in revolutionising the operations in the tourism and hospitality organisations (Buhalis & O'Connor, 2005). ICT application in the hospitality industry has been confirmed to enhance business operations and therefore contribute to customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry. For example, Cohen, and Olsen, (2013) in South Africa found that the application of ICT in the hospitality firms had significant effects on competitive performance of the firms, while its effects on customer service was positively mediated by employee outcomes. E-service operations in the hotel industry manifests in various perspectives such as e-reservation, e-payment, e-service quality, e-procurement, etc. For this current study, e-reservation was studied. There seems to be no study conducted in Nigeria to determine the relationship between e-reservation and customer satisfaction in Nigeria. This study was initiated to close this apparent gap.

Study Objectives

The broad objective of the study is to examine the relationship between e-reservation and guest satisfaction in the hotel industry in Rivers State, Nigeria. The specific objectives set for the study will be to;

1. Ascertain the relationship between e-reservation and repeat patronage of hotel guests in Rivers State, Nigeria.
2. Determine the influence of e-reservation and brand loyalty of hotel guests in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Research Hypotheses

Working towards achieving the above stated objectives, the following hypotheses are hereby formulated in their null structures;

1. **H₀₁:** There is no significant relationship between e-reservation and repeat patronage of hotels in Port Harcourt.
2. **H₀₂:** There is no significant relationship between e-reservation and brand loyalty of hotels in Port Harcourt.

Review of Literature

Theoretical Framework

Technological Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) proposed by Davis (1985) has remained the most widely used and recognized model for studies bothering on Information Technology (IT) (Awa, et al, 2012). As posited by Davis (1989) the TAM model is standing on two main pillars: Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU). Perceived usefulness was defined by Davis (1989, p. 34) as "the degree to which an individual's perception for particular system enhances job performance", and Perceived Ease of Use "as the degree to which an individual's intuition determines the use of a particular system". Organisational managers and academics are aware that a system or mechanism that makes job performance an easy task will stand a chance of being deployed by organisations. This explains why organisations adopts e-business solutions in their quest to achieve firm performance. On the other hand, consumers will prefer business systems that are easy to use during transactions. Essentially, the primary goal of TAM model is to predict, explain, analyze and explore the critical factors that influence the adoption of information technology by organisations (Liao, et al.,2018)

Conceptual Review

E-Reservation

E-reservation otherwise known as electronic reservation refers to making the appointments online, by using the internet through a web server, network or intranet. The online reservation system is used as an innovation backed by technology and serving as a booking method in the industry as it provides mobility, novelty, for the booking system and the creation of more alternatives (Agheorghiesei & Ineson, 2011). The increase in the public access to the internet and the frequent use of e-booking system in the industry is enhancing the competitive advantage and performance of the industry. Alias and Pui (2012) noted that online booking systems are very advantageous as they both increase the present and future booking for all kinds of business including tourism and hospitality. The benefits of e-reservation includes; easier, safer and cheaper business transactions.

Guest satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is very important aspect of business/marketing strategy because of its influence on consumers behavioural intentions which enhances customer retention. This makes it a very important construct for entrepreneurs and academia. This explains why the concept is described as a critical post-consumption construct (Khazaei, et al., 2014). Kotler (2000) argues that customer satisfaction describes a feeling of pleasure or disappointment by customers resulting from comparing the product's perceived performance in relation to their prior expectations. On basis of the foregoing, Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1996) noted that customer satisfaction strikes a balance between expectations of customers and what they experience with the products and services during

consumption. The measures of guest satisfaction chosen for this current study are repeat patronage and brand loyalty.

Repeat Patronage: Repeat purchase intention describes the probability that consumers purchase the same product or receive the same service from the same organisation repeatedly. Young, et al (2007, p.92) defined the concept as “the likelihood that a current customer of a restaurant expects to return in the future for a dining experience”. For a hotel and its online transactions, the concept represents continuous purchasing behaviour in terms of using the website of a hotel for online transactions. For online transactions, Chou and Hsu (2016) describes website quality as a key factor motivating consumers in the shopping process, while Kim and Peterson (2017) add that website quality guarantees accuracy, completeness, currency, and format. Repurchase intention is very important for marketing organisations because of continues patronage (Pharm & Train, 2014) which accounts for firm profitability.

Guest Loyalty: Brand *loyalty* is defined as positive feelings towards a *brand* and dedication to purchase the same product or service repeatedly now and in the future from the same *brand*, regardless of a competitor's actions or changes in the environment. Oliver (1999, p.34) defined customer loyalty as “a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour”. Loyal customers tend to repurchase from the same source (Kuika& Laukkanen, 2012). As argued by Rizwan, Javed, Aslan, Khan and Bibi (2014) when customers are loyal to a particular brand, they become more committed to buying from the organisation without considering what competitors are offering.

Empirical Review

Relationship Between E-Reservation and Customer Satisfaction

Existing study demonstrates a trend that studied the use of information and communications technology (ICT) in the tourist and hospitality business from the point of view of both the suppliers and the customers. For example, the report written by Cohen and Olsen (2013) reveals that between 2009 and 2013, the researchers discussed a wide variety of topics concerning the consumer decision making process. These topics included the awareness of a need, the search for information, the evaluation of alternatives, the choice to purchase, and the behavior after the purchase.

Jordan et al. (2013) conducted a study to explore and contrast the online search behaviors of vacationers from Belgium and the United States of America (USA) as they were organizing their trips. The research was done in the context of a comparative study. The statistical analysis revealed that tourists from Belgium have a propensity to take a longer amount of time to complete their trip planning and investigate a greater number of available choices before settling on a purchase, whilst tourists from the United States have a propensity to be more efficient and utilize only one website to organize everything pertaining to their trip. Mackay and Vogt (2012), who looked at the proliferation of ICT usage in travel activities, are responsible for another study in the consumer category. (how consumers in both online and offline environments seek for, process, and use information related to travel). Xiang and Gretzel (2010) found that the frequency with which social media websites show in search engine results has an effect on the information that travelers look for when they are looking for travel information.

Khan, and Khan,(2020) in the context online hotel booking found that rental price, location, and services quality and rating are significant tools to maximize customer satisfaction. Polites, et al, (2012) found that while trust is not a significant direct determinant of satisfaction, it negatively moderates the link between value and satisfaction. Malek, et al (2015), examined the main factors that affect Jordanian customers to adopt E-Reservation Services System in the hotel. Findings of this study indicate that there are ten direct significant relationships and one insignificant relationship. Firstly, direct significant of ERSA is attitude. Secondly, nine direct significant factors effect of attitude subsequently are information accuracy, trust, web appearance, and usefulness, eases of use, responsiveness, interactivity, reliability, and innovativeness, while integrated communications has no significant effect on customers' attitude toward ERSA in Jordan.

Kamal, et al (2018) examined selected hotel booking websites' features and their impact on online users' e-satisfaction and e-loyalty; and examine the relationship between online users' e-satisfaction and e-loyalty. Two dimensions of hotel booking website features used for the study were utilitarian features, and hedonic features. Statistical results showed that e-satisfaction influences e-loyalty indicating online hotel booking users are more likely to revisit and repurchase hotel products and services especially if, through hotel online booking experience, able to attain selected utilitarian and hedonic features.

Kim, et al (2017) found that both trust toward third-party online booking sites and trust toward hotels, which was influenced by online review, have positive impacts on individuals' intention to book. Mehta, et al (2000) argues that perceived service quality helps organisations to be well positioned for the achievement of excellent business performance. In online transactions several factors such as ease of use could account for service quality. Hong, and Slevitch, (2018) investigated how self-service kiosk (SSK) attributes like speed of delivery, ease of use, and monetary promotion affect customer satisfaction and willingness to use an SSK in the future in a hotel setting. Statistical results revealed that, ease of use and speed of delivery had a positive relationship with customer satisfaction. There was no significant relationship between monetary promotion and customer satisfaction. Also, customer satisfaction was positively associated with the willingness of consumers to use SSKs in the future. Kamal, et al (2018) examined the effect of selected hotel booking websites' features on online users' e-satisfaction and e-loyalty. The statistical results showed that utilitarian and hedonic features had significant effect on users' e-satisfaction and e-loyalty. Further analysis revealed that e-satisfaction influenced e-loyalty positively.

Research Methodology

Research Design: The research design that was adopted for this study is the descriptive survey research design. The purpose of survey research involves data collection, discovering meaning in the data collected, so that facts and events can be better explained, interpreted and understood. It equally consists of gathering data from usually a large number of respondents, who themselves constitute a sample (Osuala, 1993; Ezejelue, et al 1990).

Area of Study: The proposed geographical area of coverage for the study was in the city of Port Harcourt, Rivers State based on the distribution of upscale luxury hotels in the city.

Population: The population chosen were the hotel guests who lodged in the upscale hotels in the city of Port Harcourt at the time of carrying out the study. Due to the nature of the population, it could be described as being unknown or infinite. To qualify as respondents, the guests must have patronized the hotels for the past one year (between December 2021 and November 2022).

The population of this current study is unknown. Therefore, the required sample unit (n) of hotel guests (observation unit) is determined by using Zigmund formula which is suitable for an infinite population.

The mathematical formula is given as follows

Zigmund formula (1979, p.66)

$$n = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

Z = Statistic to be used at 5% level of significance at two tail test = 1.96

e = Allowable sampling error taken at 5% = 0.05

p = proportion of success in the population from pilot survey = 0.80

q = proportion of failure in the population from pilot survey = 0.20

n = sample size required

$$n = \frac{1.96 \times 1.96 \times 0.80 \times 0.20}{0.05 \times 0.05} = 246$$

Based on the computation above, a sample of 246 hotel guests in the upscale luxury hotels were used for this study.

Sample and Sampling Technique

Consequent on the above, the sample of 246 were apportioned among the 10 upscale equally while the remaining three was added to Hotel Presidential which was perceived to be the biggest of the hotels. The purposive or judgmental sampling which is a non-probability technique was the sampling methodology used for the study. The justification for choosing this technique is because the “researcher has the necessary background knowledge and information about the respondents” (Onodugo, et al 2010,p.72). The front office supervisors were approached for assistance during the administration of the questionnaires to the hotel guests.

Nature/Sources of Data: The main source of data used for the study is primary data which was collected from the respondents who were hotel guests in the hotels studied.

Data Collection Instrument: The principal instrument that was used for data collection in this study is a well-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire is made up of two principal parts. Part A consist of the demographic characteristics of the respondents; Part B is made up of the key constructs of the hypothesized relationships for hotel guests. The specific questions used in the survey to measure the constructs of the hypothesized framework is provided in the questionnaire. The measuring scale for the variables is interval scale, while nominal scale has been used for the respondents’ demographic variables. Items were measured, using a five-point Likert Scale that anchors by; Strongly Disagree [SD](1). Disagree [D](2), Agree [A](3), Agree fairly strongly(4) and Strongly Agree [SA](5).

Operational Measurement of Variable

Measurement is the process of assigning numbers to various degrees of observations, opinions and attitude about variables and the level of measurement is a function of the rules under which the numbers are assigned (Kothari, 2010).

For the questionnaire in this study, the variables “E-Reservation and guest satisfaction” were measured using ordinal scale; using a 5-point Likert scale format (5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 =

Undecided, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree) and modified according to the objectives of this study. The Likert-type scale of measuring variables was chosen because it is easy to construct; takes much less time; is considered more reliable as under it respondents answer each statement included in the questionnaire; and it allows use of statements that may not have a direct relationship to the attitude being studied (Kothari, 2010).

In this study, the predictor variable which was operationalized using e-reservation was adapted from Parasuraman, et al (2005) Polites, et al (2012). On the other hand, the dependent variable of guest satisfaction was measured with repeat patronage and brand loyalty and adapted from Chaudhuri & Holbrook, (2001); Nysveen, et al (2013) and Oliver, (1997).

Analysis of Questionnaire

The questionnaire in terms of distribution and demographic profile of respondents respectively.

Questionnaire Distribution and Retrieval: The distribution of the questionnaire to respondents and retrieval shows that two hundred and forty six questionnaires were administered, while one hundred and ninety five (195) copies (79.3%) were retrieved. A total of thirty 51 (20.7%) copies distributed questionnaire were not retrieved. The one hundred and ninety five (195) questionnaires were all useful.

Demographic Profile of Respondents: The gender of respondents revealed that 92 respondents (47.2%) were male, while 103 respondents (52.8%) were female. This information implies that majority of the respondents were female. The marital status of respondents showed that 73 respondents (37.4%) were single, 112 respondents (57.4%) were married, 10 respondents (5.1%) were divorced. This information implies that majority of the respondents were married. The information on occupational status indicated that 76 respondents (39.0%) were civil servant, 68 respondents (34.9%) were entrepreneurs, while (51) respondents (26.2%) were students. This implies that civil servants were of the majority. The information on age brackets of the respondents showed that 43 respondents (22.1%), were within 18-25 years, 73 respondents (37.4%) were within 26–35 years, 51 respondents (26.2%) were within 36–45, 17 respondents (8.7%) were within 46-55 years, while 11 respondents (5.6%) were greater than 56 years. This information shows that majority of the respondents were within the ages of 26 – 35 years. The educational background of respondents showed the following: O'level (22) (11.3%), OND/HND (35) (17.9%), B.Sc (71) (36.4%), M.Sc/MBA (52) (26.7%), Ph.D (15) (7.7%). From the information it shows that respondents with B.SC are of the majority.

Test of Hypotheses

Correlation Analysis

DECISION RULE

If $PV < 0.05$ = Reject H_0

$PV > 0.05$ = Accept H_0

Relationship between E-Reservation and Repeat Patronage

H_0 : There is no positive and significant relationship between e-reservation and repeat patronage value for money and guest retention

HA₁: There is positive and significant relationship between e-reservation and repeat patronage

Table 1 Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Analysis showing the relationship between e-reservation and repeat patronage

Correlations

		E-reservation	Repeat Patronage
E-reservation	Pearson Correlation	1	.777**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	195	195
Repeat Patronage	Pearson Correlation	.777**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	195	195

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The information in Table 1 shows the result of Pearson’ Product Moment Correlation Coefficient analysis. The correlation coefficient (r)=0.777. This value indicates that a very strong relationship exists between e-reservation and repeat patronage. The positive sign of the correlation coefficient is an indication that a direct association exist between e-reservation and repeat patronage..The probability value of 0.000 is less than 0.05 level of significance indicating that e-reservation has significant influence on repeat patronage. Accordingly, therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.60$) indicates that 60% change in repeat patronage can be explained by the application of e-reservation

Relationship between E-Reservation and Brand Loyalty

HO₂: There is no positive and significant relationship between e-reservation and brand loyalty

HA₂: There is positive and significant relationship between e-reservation and brand loyalty

Table 2 Pearson’s Product Moment Analysis showing the relationship between e-reservation and brand loyalty

Correlations

		E-reservation	Brand Loyalty
E-reservation	Pearson Correlation	1	.843**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	195	195
Brand Loyalty	Pearson Correlation	.843**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	195	195

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The information in Table 2 shows the result of Pearson’ Product Moment Correlation Coefficient analysis. The correlation coefficient (r)=0.843. This value indicates that a very strong relationship exists between e-reservation and brand loyalty. The positive sign of the correlation coefficient is an indication that a direct association exist between e-reservation and brand loyalty. The probability

value of 0.000 is less than 0.05 level of significance indicating that e-reservation has significant influence on brand loyalty. Accordingly, therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.71$) indicates that 71% change in brand loyalty can be explained by the application of e-reservation.

Discussion of Findings

This section discusses the findings of the study. It indicates how this study and previous studies are related or differ in certain perspectives.

Relationship between E-Reservation and Repeat Patronage

The findings of this study show that e-reservation has great relationship with repeat patronage in the hotel industry in Rivers State, Nigeria. Specifically, e-reservation has significant effect on repeat patronage at hotels with $r=.777$; $p=000<.050$. The result is consistent with previous studies (e.g Khan & Khan 2020; Malik, et al, 2015;) which established that e-reservation had influence on customer satisfaction and other customers' behavioural intentions in various market contexts.

Relationship between E-Reservation and Brand Loyalty

The findings of this study show that e-reservation has great relationship with brand loyalty in the hotel industry in Rivers State, Nigeria. Specifically, e-reservation has significant effect on brand loyalty at hotels with $(r=.843$; $p=000<.050)$. The result is consistent with previous studies (e.g Khan & Khan 2020; Malik, et al, 2015;) which established that e-reservation had influence on customer satisfaction and other customers' behavioural intentions in various market contexts.

The hotel industry in particular has fostered a dependency on ICTs since a number of its functions rely greatly on them to make strategic impact. The popularity of the Internet and e-commerce technologies have provided a platform for hotel organisations and other tourism service organisations to bypass intermediaries such as tour operators and travel agents to transact directly with their customers (Nyshadham, 2000). One of the most valid and strategic solutions for attracting more customers and enhancing business values is to sell low-cost hotel bills and facilitate booking processes, such as online reservations, through a hotels' own website (Wei & Ozok, 2005).

Conclusion

Overall, this study examined the relationship between electronic hotel operations management operations and guest satisfaction. The results of the empirical analyses have revealed that e-reservation is a very important determinant of guest satisfaction in the hotel marketing and management perspective. It is believed that these findings are very important to both academic researcher and hospitality practitioners with regard to satisfaction of guests towards hotels. The study therefore concludes that acquiring e-business infrastructure in the area of e-reservation is essential for hotels that want to enhance guest satisfaction.

Recommendations

- i. The finding showed that e-reservation had positive significant relationship with repeat purchase. To enhance repeat purchase therefore, the website should be enriched with quality and appropriate information that will enable tourists/guests to take purchase decision. The owners/managers of hotels should take advantage of the e-business revolution by investing in it in order not to lose customers to competitors.

- ii. To enhance or sustain the loyalty of hotel guests towards e-reservation process, the managers should ensure that the websites are readily available 24/7 to enhance real time processing of the documentation required. This recommendation implies that that the owners of hotels should ensure that a dedicated staff is assigned with the responsibility for on-line requests for e-reservations in the hotel industry. Being a global trade means that hospitality services in the contest of e-reservation should be on real time basis.

Suggestions for Further Study

The research had some limitations;

- (i) Only hotels operating in Port Harcourt and in the hospitality sector of the economy were studied. Other luxury hotels in other states in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria should be studied in future.
- (ii) Data were obtained in one geographical area (Port Harcourt) and specific time of year (January, 2022) in a developing country, Nigeria. Other geo-political zones in Nigeria should be added in future studies.

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