E-SERVICE QUALITY AND TRAVELLER'S BEHAVIOURAL INTENTIONS IN ONLINE TRAVEL TRADE IN PORT HARCOURT, SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA

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A B S T R A C T

The study investigated the direct effect of e-service quality on travellers' behavioural intentions in the online travel trade of the tourism industry in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The descriptive survey research generated data from 138 travellers found within the selected travel agencies during the survey with the use of a well-structured questionnaire made up of 9 scale items, with four demographic items. The result of the inferential statistical analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) showed that travellers' behavioural intentions towards online reservations are driven by e-service quality. In specific terms, information quality had a significant effect on travellers' behavioural intentions in terms of repurchase intentions while responsiveness did not. Tourism service providers at the global scale are expected to build capabilities in online reservations in terms of information quality and responsiveness to enhance positive travellers' behavioural intentions towards their online services.

K E Y W O R D S

E-Service Quality. Information Quality. Responsiveness. Brand Loyalty. Repurchase Intention.

INTRODUCTION

The essential feature of tourism as a global phenomenon in addition to the ubiquity of communication in global marketing has engendered digital marketing through e-commerce platforms (Ekeke & Etuk, 2021). The essence is to enhance on time communication with the target audience who are tourists to diverse destinations across the world (Tan, Chong & Ho, 2017). Tourism service providers such as hotels, visitor attraction centres, transporters and travel intermediaries are using Information Communication Technology (ICT) applications such as e-ticketing and online reservations to enhance their level of service quality delivery to tourists/travellers.

The ability to enhance service quality in all service market contexts to the admiration of consumers is a very challenging task for service organisations as a result of the characteristics of services. The issue gets more complicated in an e-commerce context where the service provider and the target market are thousands of kilometres apart. Consequent upon the foregoing, tourism service providers and destinations are expected to treat online service quality of their domains as a top technical and marketing priority as it enhances their service quality level as well as the promotion of their services and that of the destination image (Holloway &Taylor, 2006) because of the resultant benefits. For example, Almotairi, Al-Meshal, and Alam, (2013) noted that online banking is one of the key features of today's world modern banking system and it enhances the performance of the banking industry in addition to helping their customers to reduce their transaction costs. This advantage is equally possible in the travel trade.

Empirical evidence reveals that, the effect of e-service quality have been studied in various market contexts including Nigeria to show how e-service quality affects behavioural intentions of consumers. Examples include: online shopping in Malaysia (Eissa & Nizam 2019); online banking services in Riyadh Saudi Arabia, (Almotairi, Al-Meshal, & Alam, 2013), hotel online booking services in Malaysia (Kamal, Abdullah, Nor, Ngelambong, & Bahari, 2018) internet banking in India (Firdous & Faroqi, 2017), e-shopping in Indonesia (Paulo, Oliveira, and Farisa, (2019). However, to the best of our knowledge no study is yet to be conducted to determine the effect of e-service quality on online reservation in the Nigeria tourism industry. This current study is an attempts to fill the gap in literature by examining the effect of e-service quality on travelers' behavioural intentions towards online travel trade in Nigeria.

Literature Review
Theoretical Foundations
The Theory of Customer Satisfaction: Both marketing practitioners and academics are aware that consumers are conscious of the difference between their expectations about the quality of a product or service they intend to consume and the delivered quality. The theory of customer satisfaction describes "consumer's response to the evaluation of the perceived discrepancy between prior expectation and the actual performance of the product as perceived after its consumption" (Tse & Wilton, 1988, p. 204). It is an established fact that as consumers encounters brands through interactions and consumption, customer experience results automatically and it has been confirmed to generally affect the customer's overall satisfaction with the service brand (Grace & O'Cass, 2004). The implication being that customer satisfaction whether positive or negative is an essential outcome of customer experience. Customer satisfaction has been found to be an antecedent to customers post consumption behavioural intentions towards the brand in various market contexts (Odor & Ekeke, 2020). In Iran, for example, Atarodian (2013) found that customer satisfaction served as a predictor of attitudes toward the brand, in terms of loyalty and re-purchase intention.

Conceptual Review
E-Service Quality
E-Service quality denotes the quality of service through electronic channels. Fassnacht and Koese (as cited in Stiakakis & Georgiadis, 2011, p.196)defined e-service quality as "as the measure according to which an online service is able to meet customer needs efficiently and effectively". Organisations desiring to achieve success in online business are expected to build capability in delivering online service quality. Many scholars continue to examine and build e-service quality models to enable practitioners understand the basic dimensions of e-service quality capable of helping them to gain competitive advantage in the electronic market space.

A classical and fundamental model developed by scholars is that of Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Malhotra (2000). The authors developed the e-SERVQUAL model taking a cue from the SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988).

The authors enumerated critical 11 e-service quality dimensions from their study:
   i.   *Access*-ability to get access or navigate into the website or the company when the customer needs to do so.
   ii. *Assurance/trust*- this dimension describes a situation where the customer feels confident dealing with the site).
   iii. *Ease of navigation*-describes the ease with which the user moves easily and quickly while examining through the website pages.
   iv. *Efficiency*-site is simple to use, minimal data required as input by the customer.
   v.   *Flexibility*-in accomplishing an electronic transaction.
   vi. *Customization/personalization*-based on customer's preferences and purchase histories.
   vii. *Price knowledge*-concerning total, shipping, and comparative prices.
   viii. *Security/privacy*-site is safe from intrusion, personal information is protected.
   ix. *Site aesthetics*-appearance attributes.
   x.   *Reliability*-correct technical functioning of the site, keeping promises made to the customer.
   xi. *Responsiveness*-quick response to customer's requirements.

Five years after, Parasuraman, Valarie, Zeithmal and Malhotra,(2005) reduced the quality dimensions of e-service quality through their e-S-QUAL and the e-RecS-QUAL to seven: Efficiency, Fulfilment, System availability, Privacy, Responsiveness, Compensation, and Contact. The authors categorised the seven dimensions into 2 as follows:
   i.   Core Quality Dimensions made up of the first four dimensions : e-S-QUAL scale(Efficiency, Fulfilment, System availability, Privacy).
   ii. Recovery Quality Dimensions: e-RecS-QUAL scale(Responsiveness, Compensation, and Contact).
For this current study, the dimensions of e-service quality considered are information quality and responsiveness.

Information Quality: E-service as a process is information-driven as the physical contact between service employees and customers is absent. It therefore implies that "in e-service, information is vital for customer to make their decision since they cannot physically examine what they want to purchase and know about the company" (Li & Suomi, 2009, p.7). The authors equally provided dimensions of information quality to include updated information, current and timely information, accurate and relevant information, and information that is easy to understand.

Responsiveness: Li and Suomi (2009) describe the concept of responsiveness in online environment as being narrow when compared with responsiveness in SERVQUAL. In the e-service environment, the attributes of responsiveness include adequate contact information, timely response to customers, adequate response time, prompt response to customers and quick to resolve problems(Li & Suomi, 2009, p.6).

Travellers'/Customers' Behavioural Intentions
Behavioural intentions describes the would-be attitude of customers after patronizing a firm possibly for the first time. Behavioural intentions provides an important signal which shows if the customers will remain with or switch from the organisation or brand (Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman, 1996). In practical terms the intentions of customers could either be positive or negative (i.e., favourable or unfavourable). Customers' behavioural intention towards brands in the marketplace is very important to marketers explaining why they craft appropriate marketing strategies to ensure that they achieve positive behavioural intentions towards their brands in the marketplace. Examples of positive intentions towards brands include, positive word of mouth communication, brand/customer loyalty, increase in length of stay, paying premium prices, positive reviews (Zeithaml, et al., 1996; Cronin & Taylor 1992). Conversely, when customers are dissatisfied with a brand they tend to exhibit unfavourable attitudes which include switching the service provider, negative word of mouth, negative reviews, spending less time and money(Zeithaml, et al., 1996). Dissatisfied customers could also take legal actions depending on several factors such as threat to life.

Empirical Review and Hypotheses Development
E-Service Quality-Customers' Behavioural Intentions

Firdous and Farooqi, (2017) in New Delhi, India examined the impact of internet banking service quality on customer satisfaction. The exploratory survey utilised a Likert based questionnaire for primary data generation through judgmental and convenience sampling techniques. The respondents were a sample of 194 internet banking customers in New Delhi. The result showed that the internet banking service quality dimensions (efficiency, system availability, fulfilment, privacy, contact, responsiveness and contact individually) had a significant impact on the customer satisfaction of internet banking customers in New Delhi. The overall contribution of the dimensions was 70 in customer satisfaction in internet banking.

In Riyadh (Saudi Arabia), Almotairi, Al-Meshal, and Alam, (2013) investigated the relationship between online banking services and customer satisfaction. Utilising the SERVQUAL model, the study sampled 100 customers (university students) of the corresponding banks who are familiar with online banking services, to determine how the five dimensions of service quality (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, and empathy) determinants of customer satisfaction with purposeful sampling technique. The statistical results showed that all the dimensions of service quality proved to be significant determinant of overall satisfaction of the bank customers though with diverse significance levels. Tangibles and reliability proved to be the most influential dimensions to enhance customers' overall probability of satisfaction when compared to empathy and responsiveness.

Chaang-Iuan and Yi-Ling,(2007) conducted a research to identify the dimensions of e-travel service quality that could enhance online customer satisfaction and loyalty intention. An additional objective was to develop a reliable and valid measurement instrument for e-travel service quality. The empirical results identified five core components: information quality, security, website functionality, customer relationships and responsiveness. The empirical results showed that dimensions of e-travel quality service scale had strong predictive capability in relation to online customer satisfaction and loyalty intention.

Kamal, et al, (2018) examined selected hotel booking websites' features and the effect 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. Primary data was generated through a self report questionnaire which was distributed to a total of 260 respondents. Data analysis showed that   e-satisfaction influenced e-loyalty which implied that online hotel booking users are more likely to revisit and repurchase hotel products and services especially because of their hotel online booking experience which attains selected utilitarian and hedonic features.

Paulo, Oliveira, and Farisa, (2019) designed and conducted a study to   determine the most important dimensions of e-service quality that have impact on customer satisfaction, customer trust, and customer behaviour, based on extant literature on e-service quality in online shopping. Basically four-dimensions of e-service quality model were used. Primary data was sourced from an online survey of 355 Indonesian online consumers , while the research model was tested with structural equation modelling. The analytical results indicated that three dimensions of e-service quality: website design, security/privacy and fulfilment had effect on customer behaviour. Also, customer service did not significantly relate to overall e-service quality. Overall e-service quality was statistically significantly related to customer behaviour.

We therefore expect that:

H1: E-Service Quality has direct and significant effect on travellers' behavioural intentions in online travel trade in Port Harcourt.

H1a: Information quality has significant effect on travellers' behavioural intentions in the online travel trade in Port Harcourt.

H1b: Responsiveness has significant effect on travellers' behavioural intentions in the online travel trade in Port Harcourt.

Research Methodology

Research design: The descriptive research design was adopted for the study. The choice of the research design is due to the fact that the study generated data based on the attitude, perception and behavioural intentions of travellers who perform transactions on the internet.

Sample and data collection: The population of study was current travellers and customers of ten Travel Agencies operating in Port Harcourt. With Freund and William's formula for sample size determination from unknown population, a sample size of 150 customers was determined from the unknown population. The sample of customers studied were those found at the offices of the Travel Agencies studied at the time of questionnaire administration. A convenience sampling technique was adopted to generate primary data using a well-structured questionnaire. A total of 140 questionnaires were retrieved out of the 150 administered, with 100 being useful and were subjected to data analysis.

Demographic Profile of Respondents: Respondents' demographic profile revealed the following: gender- 37 (37%) were male while 63 (63%) were female; age of the respondents- 7 (7%), were within 18 – 22 years, 30 (30%) were within 23–37 years, 20 (20%) were within 28–32years, while 31 (31%) were within 33-37 years, 12 (12%) were greater than 38 years; marital status of the respondents-26 (26%) were single, 56 (56%) were married, 11 (11%) were divorces and 7 (7%) were widowed; respondents' level of education. O'level (7) (7%), OND/NCE (15) (15%), B.Sc/HND (44) (44%), M.Sc/MBA (21) (21%), Ph.D (15) (15%).

Measurement Instrument and Questionnaire design

A well-structured questionnaire was the major instrument for data collection. All the measurement items were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale anchored by: Strongly Disagree [SD](1). Disagree [D](2), Agree [A](3), Agree fairly strongly(4) and Strongly Agree [SA](5) to express the degree of agreement with the items or otherwise.

All the items were adapted from extant literature. The two latent variables of e-service quality; information quality (3 items) and responsiveness (3 items) were measured using items adapted from Li and Suomi (2009) and Eissa and Nizan, (2019) respectively. Customers' behavoural intentions were adapted from Ryu, Lee, and Kim, (2012). and Jiang, Yang, and Jun (2012).

Research Results
Reliability Analysis

Table 1 Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.979	.982	9

A Cronbach Alpha of .982 based on standardized items was determined as shown in Table 1. the result ascertained the reliability of the research instrument and the value is above the threshold value of .7 as suggested by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). Thus the measuring instrument was considered internally consistent and therefore useful in measuring opinions of travelers in the quest to determine the effect of e-service quality on travelers' behavioural intentions in the context of online travel trade.

Discriminant Validity

Table 2 Correlation Matrix[a]

		Responsiveness	Information Quality	Travellers' Behavoural Intentions
Correlation	Responsiveness	1.000	.897	.862

Information Quality	.897	1.000	.927
Travellers' Behavioural Intentions	.862	.927	1.000

a. Determinant = .026

Discriminant validity is defined by Hair Jr, Black, Babin, and Anderson, (2010, p.126) as the "the degree to which two conceptually similar concepts are distinct". Fornell and Larker (1981) suggested that discriminant validity occurs if the diagonal elements are higher than all the off-diagonal elements in their columns and rows in a correlation matrix. The result as shown in Table 2, therefore confirms the discriminant validity.

Sampling Adequacy

Table 3 KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.906
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1703.495
	Df	36
	Sig.	.000

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed on 9 exploratory items of determinants of e-service quality and travellers' behavioural intentions for the conduct of the KMO and Bartlett's Test. The result is shown in Table 3 demonstrates that Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant at $pv=.000$, while KMO measure of sampling adequacy is .906 which is far greater than 0.5 that has been suggested as a minimum level by Kasser (as cited in Wong & Musa 2010, p. 3417).

Data Analyses and hypotheses testing

To ascertain the effect of e-service quality on travellers' behavioural intentions, the hypothesized relationships were subjected to statistical analysis using Multiple regression analysis.

Testing of hypotheses H1, H1a: H1b

Decision Rule

If   PV < 0.05 =   Hypothesis is supported

          PV > 0.05 =   Hypothesis is not supported

Hypothesis one

Table 4 describes the summary of the simple regression analysis showing the effect of e-service quality on travellers' behavioural intentions.

Table 4. The regression analysis for the influence of e-service quality on travellers' behavioural intentions

Dependent variable	Independent Variable	Beta(β)	t-value	*p-value*
Travellers' Behavioural Intentions	E-Service Quality	.766	11.780	0.00**

Notes: $P \leq 0.05$; R=.766; R^2 =.588; Adjusted R^2 =.582; F=138.772; *P=0.000*

From the Table, the following results are shown; standardized beta (β) e-service quality $\beta = 0.766$, R square = 0.588, F = 138.772 and $p=.000 < 0.05$. This specifies that e-service quality explains 58.8% variation in travellers' behavioural intentions in travel trade in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

The outcome of analysis show that e-service quality had significant effect on travellers' behavioural intentions to the online travel trade($\beta = 0.766$, p=0.000 < 0.05). Therefore hypothesis one (H1) is supported.

Multiple Regression Analysis for dimensions of E-Service Quality H1a and H1b

Table 5 Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.201	.144		8.333	.000
	Information Quality	.632	.068	.787	9.285	.000
	Responsiveness	.127	.069	.157	1.849	.067

a. Dependent Variable: Travellers' Behavioural Intentions

Table 5 provides the multiple regression analysis for the contribution of the two dimensions of e-service quality used in the study and hypothesised as H1a and H1b respectively. The table shows that un-standardized beta (β) of information quality and responsiveness   are: ($\beta = 0.632$), and ($\beta = 0.127$) respectively. This specifies that information quality made the greatest contribution to the model.

The result of the regression analysis shows that only information quality ($\beta = 0.632$, p=0.000 < 0.05) provided by the online travel trade in influencing travellers' behavioural intentions made significant contribution to explaining the dependent variable, while responsiveness ($\beta = 0.127$, p=0.067>0.05) did not.
Therefore the model can be written as:

Travellers' Behavioural Intentions = 0.632(IQ) +0.127(RP) +1.201

The model suggest that by associating any of the two dimensions of e-service quality of an online travel trade, the empirical model can increase the level of travellers' intention to engage in online transactions when other things remain constant. Accordingly therefore, changes in information quality of travel trade can have the biggest influence on level of travellers' behavioural intention towards online transactions as its beta co-efficient ($\beta = 0.632$, p=0.000 < 0.05) is the highest and significant.

Result Summary
H1: The outcome of analysis show that   e-service quality had significant effect on travellers'behavioural intentions in terms of repurchase intentions to the online travel trade in Port Harcourt ($\beta = 0.766$, p=0.000 < 0.05). Hypothesis is supported

H1a: The outcome of analysis show that information quality had significant effect on travellers' behavioural intentions in terms of repurchase intentions to the online travel trade in Port Harcourt ($\beta = 0.632$, p=0.000< 0.05). Hypothesis is supported

H1b: The outcome of analysis show that responsiveness had no significant effect on travellers'behavioural intentions in terms of repurchase intentions to the online travel trade in Port Harcourt ($\beta = 0.127$, p=0.067< 0.05). Hypothesis is not supported.

Discussion of Results

Hypothesis 1 showed a significant effect of e-service quality on travellers' behavioural intentions to the online travel trade ($\beta = 0.766$, $p=0.000 < 0.05$).   Therefore, H1 is supported. This finding is consistent with the findings of Chaang-Iuan and Yi-Ling,(2007).

Hypothesis 1a showed a significant effect of information quality on travellers' behavioural intentions in terms of repurchase intentions to the online travel trade in Port Harcourt ($\beta = 0.632$, $p=0.000< 0.05$). Therefore, H1b is supported. This finding is consistent with the findings of Kamal, et al.,(2018).

Hypothesis 1b showed a significant effect of responsiveness had significant effect on travellers' behavioural intentions in terms of repurchase intentions to the online travel trade in Port Harcourt ($\beta = 0.127$, $p=0.067< 0.05$). Therefore, H1 is not supported. This finding is not consistent with the findings of Chaang-Iuan and Yi-Ling,(2007).

Conclusion

The research effort examined the effect of e-service quality on travellers' behavioural intentions at travel trade in the tourism market segment in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The empirical results supported H1 and H1a while H1b was not supported. A very important finding of the study is the fact that statistical analysis of the combined influence of information quality and responsiveness explain up to 58.8% variation in travellers' positive behavioural intentions to online travel trade in the context of reservations. The reason may not be far-fetched, as it could be ascribed to the fact that an average traveller will like to take advantage of a fast track process of travel trade transactions that is capable of saving him cost and time. This is in support of the customer satisfaction theory.

It is therefore safe to conclude by stating that the outcome of the research indicates that e-service quality in terms of information quality is an important determinant of travellers' behavioural intentions such as making use of electronic channels in the online travel trade repeatedly. It is very important for entrepreneurs and managers of online travel trade to identify, evaluate, develop and manage relevant electronic channels according to customers' expectations. Insightful and fruitful implications to both entrepreneurs (the practitioners) and academics could be provided from this empirical study.

Implications of the Study

The relationship dynamics between consumers and use of technology applications in commercial transaction tends to enhance customer satisfaction. The current study is an attempt to investigate the influence of e-service quality as a predictor of travellers/customers' behavioural intention in terms of repurchase intention in an African context. As expected the findings has fruitful and useful implications to both practitioners and academicians.

On the academic side, this current study contributes significantly to the service quality management literature by systematically exploring the effect of two dimensions of e-service quality (information quality and responsiveness) on customers' behavioural intentions in the contest of online travel trade in Nigeria. Therefore, the findings of this study provides tentative support to the proposition that service quality should be recognized as significant antecedents for gaining and sustaining positive customers' behavioural intentions in online travel trade in Nigeria.

On the practitioners' side, the significant influence of e-service quality in terms of information quality is highlighted. Certainly, Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) and other tourism service suppliers like hotel owners and managers can benefit from the implications of these findings. For instance, given the robust relationship (adjusted R squared) between e-service quality and customers' behavioural intentions (0.582) OTAs and other tourism service organisations ought to pay attention to service quality dimensions in order to build positive travellers' behavioural intentions.   For example, by improving the quality of information provided on their websites in line with the needs of their target markets, customer satisfaction and repurchase intentions could be achieved.

Limitations and Future Research

The research has some limitations despite how useful the current study is. First, the data was collected from a cross section of Nigerians who are travellers and do make use of the internet to make travel transactions. Thus the generalizability of the research findings could be improved upon if future research replicates this research model in other commercial sectors of the economy such as online shopping.

Secondly, the present study examined only two dimensions of e-service quality (information quality and responsiveness) out of the many dimensions of e-service quality. Future studies should examine other important dimensions of e-service quality as proposed by Parasuraman, et al (2005).

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