LINK BETWEEN SELF-STYLE HOTEL CLASSIFICATION, GRADING STANDARD AND SERVICE QUALITY IN JOS, NIGERIA

[1]**Asuquo Maryam Garpiya**
[1]Department of Tourism and Events,
Afe Babalola University Ado
Ekiti State.
[1]Department of Hospitality Management
Federal Polytechnic Mubi.
Adamawa State.
Email. mamaibromummy@gmail.com
+2348065603244

[2]**Adeyemi J. Ademowo**
[2]Department of Sociology,
Afe Babalola University Ado Ekiti,
Ekiti State.
Email.yemi.ademowo@abuad.edu.ng
+2348166722200

[3]**Tijani O. Nasiru**
[3]Department of Tourism and Events,
Afe Babalola University Ado Ekiti.
Ekiti State.
Email.tijinasiru@yahoo,com
+2348036828511

Abstract

This paper investigates the link between self style hotel classification grading standard and service quality in Jos, Nigeria. As hotels grow in number, there is need to classify and grade hotels based on common characteristics. Classification is a code form that would combine the comfort level and range of services related to specific class. Grading and classification are synonymous which is tantamount to standardisation and control of hotel operations to reduce risk of using hotel facilities, protecting the health and safety of customers. Since 1999, Nigerian government desired to generate a uniform standard accommodation to encourage and facilitate the joint promotion of tourism product in West Africa to boost the flow of tourists to the country and sub-region. Up till date Nigeria is yet to classify or grade its hotel despite development of various documents which are not enforced by law. The aim of the study is to evaluate the self-acclaimed classification and grading of hotels in Jos and how they are being sustained by hotel operators without government objection. Also, to examine customer perception of service quality. The data of the study was collected from three local governmentareas; Jos North, South, and East. A structured questionnaire was distributed to 166 hotels of various self-acclaimed classes but only 56 hotels filled them and were returned which was used and 3 government agencies; Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC), Plateau State Tourism Corporation (PSTC) and Standard Organisation of Nigeria (SON) were also given questionnaires. A face to face interview was conducted to the executive of the Nigerian Hotel Owners, Jos branch. A total number of 750 questionnaires

were distributed, filled correctly and collected. Descriptive statistical tools were used to test for normality, regression and correlation in SPSS, which was used to analyse the data collected. At the end of the research it was discovered that independent hotels play a major role in hotel classification and grading hence the tendency for self-proclaimed classification. Hotel classification strategies adopted by Jos hoteliers provide that even though the hotels satisfy some requirements to be graded and classified as suitable for business, the strategies were adopted based on service quality disregarding infrastructural requirements. The frequency of visits for supervision conducted by government regulatory bodies (agencies) for hotels is widely spread hampering their ability to observe whether accurate operation systems are adopted by hotels in Jos or not. The relationship between adopted classification strategies does not affect service standard in the hotel.

Keywords: Classification, Grading, Customer Perception, Service Quality

INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry has contributed substantially to Nigeria's economic prosperity over the years. As a result of continuous increases in international tourists arriving Nigeria, the tourism industry has attracted investments from both international chains hotels as well as local entrepreneurs. A tourist arriving at the destination would like to settle down before visiting the various tourism sites or locations in the region. This explains why most major tourist attractions have provisions for all kinds of accommodation or hotels to keep a progressive patronage from visitors from all over the world.The hotel is described as a home away from home and as the need for people to travel has increased, and as more people travel, they need clean, comfortable and safe hotel services (Igbojeckwe, Okoli and Ugo-Okoro, 2013). Middleton and Clark (1999) suggest that hotel plays a functional role by providing the facilities that make travel expedient and contented. Hence, Hall (1999) regards a hotel as one of the most critical components on the demand side because the standard of accommodation significantly influences the type of visitors who come to a hotel. The hotel business, which provides temporary lodgement for customers, offers relaxation, business facilities for business customers, seminars, conference facilities, and accommodation for their participants. However, the hospitality sector of the tourism industry offers distinctive products and services whose quality affects the destination image and competitiveness (Ingram, 1995). Pearce (1995), opines that a hotel is the most visible and pure manifestation of tourism in a city. The continued springing up of hotels is evidence that the tourism industry is growing and perceived as profitable. The hotel industry has grown in prominence and plays a role in fostering tourism and local economic development at the destination. Despite its immense contributionsand rapid expansion of the hotel industry, the hotel industry has faced some challenges in recent years. There has not been a national rating program to demonstrate tangible and intangible characteristics of a hotel property and to demonstrate its value to consumers.Indeed, even as a vacationer is making arrangements for his movement and conceivable convenience, he likewise considers his wellbeing while on the excursion. Each vacationer or tourist would need to get back to rejoin with their family healthy and mentally sound.Hotels seek some sort of standardization to assure consistent and comparable service quality and one of the requirements is that the hotel has a reliable method for grading and certifying the hotel's quality including its facilities and services to conform to international standards. Hotels in Nigeria have generated above US$ 3 billion yearly for the past five years (Bello & Bello 2020; Madugbe, 2016; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2015). This shows that the hotel industry has an effect on the Nigerian economy (Nikki, Sunset, Basheena, Oser, Nicolasand Michae, 2015). It can also be seen, as UNWTO (2017) suggested

that the tourism sector is critical in the socio-economic transformation of developing countries.

Expectedly, the development of Nigeria Hotel Standard would raise the quality of service provided by Nigeria hotels through benchmarking and alignment with international standards. Furthermore, it should serve as a common ground for granting equal recognition to both Nigerian owned and managed hotels, as well as to international chains. Customers and tour operators could identify the levels of hotel service and evaluate hotel performance against their expectations.With their importance in tourism, many are of the view that there is a need to classify hotels; to organize and group hotel establishments based on common characteristics (Tefera and Govender, 2015). Classification of the hotel is a coded form that would combine the comfort level and range of services related to the specific class (Foris, 2011). The classification objectives are taken into consideration by adopting an official classification system that can be purchased by customers (Foris, 2014).

Hotel classification separates different types and ranges of accommodation into several categories based on a range of criteria. Hotel accommodations can be classified into five to seven categories, Star 1- Star 7. Hotel classification and grading are synonymous. Grading is used to distinguish hotels for their price, services and facilities level (Cser and Ohuchi 2008). Also grading comprises ranking the same class establishments within a particular group according to quality. The hotel grading is also tantamount to standardization and control of hotel operations. Also, to enforce standards and reduce the risk associated with usage of hotel facilities, protecting the health and safety of customers (Bello and Bello, 2020).

Standardization has to do with implementing and developing technical standards as stated by the International Standard Organization (ISO) as regarding hotel operation. A standard is a document established by a consensus of subject experts and approved by a recognized body that guides the design, use, or performance of materials, products, processes, services, systems, or persons (Salim, 2021). Standards are developed based on demand to address specific concerns in business hence, to facilitate trade, respond to a need in the market, and develop through a multi-stakeholder process based on global expert opinion and consensus. The advantages of standardization include: improving the clarity of the business, guaranteeing quality, promoting productivity, boosting employee confidence, and perfect customer service. The government of countries, through agencies, formulates regulations and policies that guide the operating standard of hotel facilities (Bello, 2012) which the hotel operators are expected to adhere to in their business.

The Nigerian hotel classification emanated from the need to guarantee a uniform standard of accommodation to encourage and facilitate the joint promotion of tourism products in West Africa. It is also to coordinate tourism development activities in the region to integrate the tourism sector within the sub-region. It is the opinion of stockholders that, this will boost the flow of tourists to the sub-region (ECOWAS, 1999). At the fortieth meeting of the Trade, Customs, Immigration, Money and Payments Commission held in Lomé from 22nd-23rd Nov.1999, the council of Ministers for West Africa Tourism Organizations recommended and adopted standards and classifications of hotels, motels, and guest houses. Twenty-one years after, Nigeria is yet to implement the recommendation.

The Nigerian government has not classified the hotels, despite the fact that there is a document, ''*The Nigerian Tourism Development Master Plan 2006''*, that regulates hotel operations. Also, there is a document known as *National Classification and Grading of Hotels and other Serviced Accommodations in Nigeria*,(the 7th Edition 2001) that was not gazetted (not passed into law), written by the Nigeria Tourism Development Corporation

(NTDC) in collaboration with the Standard Organization of Nigeria (SON) and endorsed by the Technical Committee of Tourism Stakeholders (TCTS). The document aims to improve the standard and prescribe the minimum grading criteria for hotels and other serviced accommodation in the country. It is also intended to give guidance on the level of services and range of facilities provided by hotels and other service accommodations in the tourism sector.

Customers have a confident expectation of the hotel services, but they are often disappointed with one or more of the hotel characteristics that stretch from value and service to facilities (Heung, 2000). When facilities are provided without quality service and value for money is not given to the customers. Customers have high expectations when staying at hotels, some spend their hard-earn money and others corporation's money, still they are keen to receive the best possible care, service, and comfort (Rhee and Yang, 2015).

Customer perception is the total of customer expectation and their satisfaction or dissatisfaction experiences during their stay in the hotel. The customer's value before entering the hotel and the actual judgement of the service experiences can be positive or negative. The perception depends on factors like product price, current needs of the customer, the promise made by the hotel, and the possibility of satisfying the expectation before experience. Customer expectations and the perceived service are not constant factors and depend on many variables. According to Dobski (2002), variables influencing perception include waiting time for service, service quality, the aesthetic of the interior, and the hotel's surroundings. Customer expectations are beliefs about service delivery that function as a standard or reference point against which performance is judged. Customers form perception when they assess the quality of the product and service.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2003) look at quality service as a result of the process that implies the satisfaction of all the legitimate product and service needs, requirements, and expectations of the consumer, at an acceptable price. In conformity with mutually accepted contractual conditions and the underlying quality determinants such as safety and security, hygiene, accessibility, transparency, authenticity, and harmony of the tourism activity concerned with its human and natural environment.Kotler, Bowen, and Makens (2006) opined that the most critical step in service quality delivery in the hotel is the knowledge of the needs of customers. Similarly, Kuo (2009) states that the most challenges of a hotel manager in the modem hotel operation arethe ability to supply qualitative service to customers and keep them satisfied. According to Parasuman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988), service in the hotel context explains a phenomenon that emphasizes all actions and reactions that customers perceive they have purchased. The concept of hotel classification and grading hinges on standardizing the quality of service offered by hotels establishment based on the available facilities. Thus, the quality of service is determined by the quality of facilities available as well as the service provided.So it is necessary to classify and grade each hotel based on the quality of facilities by the government or public organization to control its activities. The classification is to inform customers about the quality of service or products expected before patronizing a particular hotel.

Legislation is the key element without which the hotel classification and grading regulation and control cannot occur. The legislation gives the legal and enforcement powers to the government and their private sector over the hotel operation and control. Hotels are given numerical level which raises customer expectation and, if the difference is noticed, brings about a mismatch of customer perception with resulting dissatisfaction (Callan, 1992).

The Hotel Inspectorate Section of NTDC is supposed to be the watchdog to all the hotels in Nigeria to ensure that standards are adhere to in line with the approved classification and grading. In the absence of watchdogs, hotels adopt classification and grading consider suitable to them (self- classification and grading), and NTDC cannot effect any standard. This creates variation in standard and measurement of servicequality.There is an enormous gap between customers' expectations and hotel experiences which is the reason hotel classification systems fail to guarantee hotel service quality (Ariffin&Maghzi, 2012). Customers expect high standards from hotels with high star ratings but the hotel ratings provided by the classification system simply don't measure up. It is against this backdrop that the study seeks to investigate the impact of hotel classification and grading system on hotel service quality as perceived by hotel managers and customers as well as relevant stakeholders in the industry.

Statement of the Problem.

The Nigerian hotel industry has been battling with issues on standards and classifications. In most cases, guests are thrown into confusion when considering where to lodge to have their satisfaction guaranteed. This has resulted in low patronage and in some cases, hotels are forced to premature closures due to poor satisfactory assurance for guests. A few conclusions from respondents have not given a genuine reflection of the circumstance situation. There is a lot of work done on classification, grading and customer evaluation of quality service of hotels in developed countries and some African countries (Jiang and Taylor, 2020 Florida, USA, Castro and Ferreira, 2018, Lisbon EU, Hargreaves, 2015 Singapore, Fredrick 2019, Kenya). However, in Nigeria, despite attempts that have been made to develop similar documents (e.g. Standard for National Classification and Grading of Hotels and other Serviced Accommodation in Nigeria and The Nigeria Tourism Development Master Plan, 2006), hotels have not been officially classified and graded. It is also worrisome to note that in spite of measures and standard adopted at the 40[th]meeting of the Trade, Customs, Immigration, Money and Payments Commission held in Lomé from 22nd-23rd Nov.1999, where the Council of Ministers for West Africa Tourism Organizations recommended encourage the need to classify and grade hotels, 21 years after, Nigeria is yet to implement the recommendation. This lacuna has hotel operators to developing individual standards to classify and grade their respective hotels as One Star, Two-star, three-star, four star and five Star hotel. This self-standardization is not in tandem whit small medium and large hotels recommended in the NTDMP, 2006. These "self- classification" and "self –grading" measures have become a sort of accepted norm despite its contradiction with the NTDMP. Of special concern is the fact that there has been no formal complaint or petition from customers of the hotels regarding the quality service and standard of operation for reasons yet to be unraveled.

Iyiade's (2009) research in Nigeria revealed that high socio-economic customers in Nigeria spend more in hotels and are not satisfied by services offered to them in hotels. Ayuba (2014) revealed that despite efforts by services providers, customers still remain dissatisfied. Olorunniwo et al., (2006) argued that if customers' needs are met, they will be satisfied. Customer satisfaction is parallel to financial success and business growth. Ojo (2010) stated that customers' consumption experiences continuously changes their expectation and consequently perception of services offered to them. Adejo (2013) reported that changes in people's income, time and social activities also cause shift in customers' perceived quality of service and thus their satisfaction.

Customers' satisfaction is synonymous to repeat patronage, positive words of mouth andincreased market share. Studies are being carried out globally to ascertain factors thatdetermine customer satisfaction of products and services in order to gain customers'loyalty, repeat visit and positive words of mouth and consequently referrals (Ha & Jang, 2010; Bhattacharya, Sengupta & Mishra, 2011; Tuan, 2012; Sabir, Ghafoor, Hafeez, Akhar & Rahman, 2014; Ngoc & Tran, 2015). Different factors such as food, environmental quality, service quality, price, locations and security have been researchedon with varying results in different regions even within a country. Customer satisfaction with the quality of products and services has continued to be achallenge to hospitality managers in Nigeria (Igbojekwe & Manangwu, 2015). In Plateau, scanty literature has been written specifically to reveal factors of banquetservices which customers would like managers to lay emphasis on in order to satisfytheir needs and claim their loyalty.

Therefore, the study seeks to evaluate how the self-styled classification and grading is being sustained in Jos, Plateau state, by the hotel operators despite the fact there is no governmental regulation. It also seeks to examine customer perception of service quality in the hotel's vis a vis their supposed advertised classification and grading status. Hence, unlike extant studies in developed countries and other countries on African hotels that evaluate adherence to standard and its effect on service quality, this study seek to unravel the customer perception of service quality in a country with unimplemented but approved standardization system that still allows free-for-all or self –style classification and grading. This is in a view to explore the relationship among hotel ratings and service quality, customer satisfaction and loyalty in the context of the hotel industry in Jos, Plateau State of Nigeria.

Research Design

A mixed-method of research design would be adopted for the study. The researcher will use one quantitative and one qualitative method to collect, analyze and report findings in the study. When mixed method is used, a broader perspective of the overall issue is uncovered compared to when a single approach is used (Stockley et al., 2017). Both quantitative and qualitative data could be collected at the same time or one after the other depending on the type of model used or adopted by the researcher (Polit and Beck, 2012).

This study would employ a concurrent triangulation design that generally involves the collecting the data at the same pace, but separate collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data will be done (Creswell, 2014). The rationale for this approach is that this approach offers a variety of datasets to explain different aspects of a phenomenon of interest and for provision of information for a robust and reliable conclusion (Zohrabi, 2013).

A descriptive research design of cross-sectional survey type would be used for quantitative data collection while in-depth interview would be used to explore the objectives of the study from the hotel owners of the selected hotels with help of a sound recorder.

Link between hotel classification and service quality

First of all, based on three variables; Service Quality (SQ), Hotel Classification and Grading (CG) and Classification Strategies (CS) adopted by respondents; where, SQ comprised the mean of; SD6, SD7, SD9, SD10, SD11, SD12, SD14, SD17, SD23, SD24, SD25, SD26, SD27, SD30, and SD35: CG comprised the mean of; SD1, SD2, SD3, SD4, SD5, SD8, SD13, SD15, SD16, SD18, SD19, SD20, SD21, SD22, SD28, SD29, SD31, SD32, SD34, and SD36: and CS comprised the mean of: SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4, SC5, SC6, SC7, SC8, SC9, SC10, SC11, SC12, SC13, SC14, SC15, SC16, SC17, and SC18 (see Table 1and 2).

Table 1. Management defined link between hotel classification and service quality

Statement	Code	SA	A	D	SD	N	Mn.	SD
Hotel classificationaffects service standard	SD1	23%	40%	33%	4 %	226	2.17	.834
The staff are professionals to the standard classified	SD2	31%	63%	2 %	4 %	232	1.78	.663
Customers get value for money paid	SD3	54%	43%	2 %	1 %	229	1.51	.614
The standard of service offers matches the classification	SD4	45%	53%	2 %	0 %	232	1.58	.544
The hotel facilities are working properly	SD5	55%	39%	6 %	0 %	232	1.51	.612
Is the tariff matching the class of the hotel ?	SD6	54%	42%	4 %	0 %	232	1.49	.571
The interior decoration is expensive	SD7	37%	48%	13%	1 %	232	1.78	.716
The room service is timely	SD8	44%	49%	7 %	0 %	229	1.63	.619
The cleanness of the environment is excellent	SD9	65%	33%	0 %	3 %	224	1.40	.628
The restaurant is operational 24/7	SD10	64%	29%	4 %	4 %	224	1.48	.746
The environment is safe	SD11	75%	21%	3 %	1 %	224	1.30	.582
There is sport facilities in the hotel	SD12	16%	28%	39%	16%	224	2.60	1.026
The hotel is in a quiet and clean atmosphere	SD13	68%	28%	4 %	0 %	221	1.35	.556
The room are spacious	SD14	53%	37%	9 %	1 %	226	1.58	.705
There is personalized service offered to customers	SD15	38%	42%	18%	3 %	215	1.86	.806
Bathroom fittings, water, sanitation are working	SD16	60%	36%	1 %	2 %	226	1.46	.653
Hotel accommodation details are available in the website	SD17	48%	30%	10%	12%	215	1.86	1.022
The hotel website is opened regularly	SD18	35%	42%	10%	13%	215	2.01	.993
Picture and video chips of hotel are available	SD19	34%	55%	4 %	8 %	215	1.86	.823
Easy online booking options	SD20	27%	41%	22%	10%	218	2.15	.941
Easy payment option	SD21	46%	44%	9 %	1 %	226	1.65	.692
Accept debit, credit and international cards	SD22	37%	38%	22%	2 %	226	1.90	.831
Fully computerized services	SD23	28%	38%	25%	9 %	226	2.14	.932
Online feedback system	SD24	15%	44%	31%	11%	210	2.37	.866
Hotel classification determine the types of customers a hotel attract	SD25	38%	51%	9 %	3 %	215	1.77	.724
The facilities in the hotel matches the standard level of service	SD26	52%	43%	2 %	2 %	226	1.56	.671
The hotel is unique in its products	SD27	58%	37%	5 %	0 %	226	1.47	.593

Staff are able to differentiate business and tourism customers	SD28	27%	60%	12%	1 %	218	1.87	.652
The beds are comfortable	SD29	53%	44%	1 %	1 %	226	1.51	.594
The toilets are spacious and hygienic	SD30	56%	43%	0 %	1 %	226	1.47	.572
The hotel furnishes with basic amenities like tooth paste, soap, shampoo, towels, toilet papers	SD31	41%	47%	9 %	4 %	226	1.75	.767
Room supplies are provided (stationary, tea, coffee, drinking water etc.)	SD32	39%	38%	18%	5 %	221	1.89	.877
The beds are of correct size compared to the room types	SD33	49%	49%	1 %	0 %	226	1.52	.527
The bed is clean with wash blanket	SD34	60%	38%	1 %	0 %	226	1.41	.519
The hotel has international direct dial (IDD)	SD35	20%	32%	39%	9 %	210	2.37	.912
The TV, Refrigerator, Lighting, fan, AC are in working condition	SD36	67%	31%	1 %	1 %	226	1.37	.580

Note. 'SA' = Strongly Agree (0.99 – 1.00), 'A' = Agree (1.01 – 1.99), 'D' = Disagree (2.00 – 2.99), 'SD' = Strongly Disagree (3.00 – 4.00), N = number of Valid responses and St. = Standard Deviation.
Source: fieldwork, 2022

Also, an assessment of the descriptive statistical mean of Likert response for the link between hotel classification and service quality as perceived by the hotel customers, shown in table 2 revealed that majority of the hotel's; 'staff are professionals to the standard classified' (mean value = 1.80), 'give customers value for their money' (mean value = 1.58), 'standard of service offered matches their classification' (mean value = 1.63), 'facilities are working properly' (mean value = 1.73), 'tariff matches the class of the hotel' (mean value = 1.68), 'interior decorations are expensive' (mean value = 1.94), 'room service is timely' (mean value = 1.76), 'cleanness of environment is excellent' (mean value = 1.38), 'restaurant is operational 24/7' (mean value = 1.80), 'environment is safe' (mean value = 1.35), 'are located in a clean and quiet atmosphere' (mean value = 1.45), 'rooms are spacious' (mean value = 1.72), 'offer personalized service to customers' (mean value = 1.83), 'bathroom fittings, water, and sanitation are working properly' (mean value = 1.62), 'accommodation details are available in the website' (mean value = 1.86), 'have easy payment option' (mean value = 1.76), 'classification determine the types of customers a hotel attract' (mean value = 1.83), 'facilities matches the standard level of service provided' (mean value = 1.78), 'are unique in their products' (mean value = 1.71), 'staff are able to differentiate business and tourism customers' (mean value = 1.84), 'beds are comfortable' (mean value = 1.48), 'toilets are spacious and hygienic' (mean value = 1.65), 'are furnished with basic amenities like tooth paste, soap, shampoo, towels, toilet papers' (mean value = 1.80), 'beds are of correct size compared to the room types' (mean value = 1.69), 'beds are clean with washed blankets' (mean value = 1.48), and 'TV, Refrigerator, Lighting, fan, AC are in working condition' (mean value = 1.55)

This assessment of table 2, also revealed that majority of the hotels; 'classification does not affect their service standard' (mean value = 2.16), 'lack sport facilities' with (mean value = 2.75), 'accommodation details are not available in their websites' (mean value = 2.05), 'website is not opened regularly' (mean value = 2.15), 'picture and video chips of hotel are not available' (mean value = 2.05), 'do not have easy online booking options' (mean value = 2.12), 'accept debit, credit and international cards' (mean value = 2.00), 'do not have fully computerized services' (mean value = 2.25), 'do not have online feedback system' (mean

value = 2.40), 'room supplies are not provided' (mean value = 2.02), and 'do not have international direct dial' (mean value = 2.37).

Therefore, given that the response gotten from both hotel management and customers in Jos have been compiled, a graphical comparative mean analysis was carried out; see figure 1.

Table 2: Customer defined link between hotel classification and service quality

Statement	Code	SA	A	D	SD	N	Mn.	St.
Hotel classification affectsservice standard	SD1	33%	28%	30%	9%	425	2.16	.996
The staff are professionals to the standard classified	SD2	36%	53%	6%	5%	425	1.80	.760
Customers get value for money paid	SD3	52%	40%	5%	3%	432	1.58	.727
The standard of service offers matches the classification	SD4	44%	52%	3%	2%	425	1.63	.630
The hotel facilities are working properly	SD5	44%	45%	5%	6%	438	1.73	.814
Is the tariff matching the class of the hotel ?	SD6	36%	61%	2%	2%	438	1.68	.586
The interior decoration is expensive	SD7	28%	54%	15%	3%	432	1.94	.747
The room service is timely	SD8	40%	51%	3%	6%	418	1.76	.797
The cleanness of the environment is excellent	SD9	66%	31%	2%	2%	432	1.38	.604
The restaurant is operational 24/7	SD10	53%	33%	9%	5%	432	1.80	1.427
The environment is safe	SD11	70%	27%	2%	2%	438	1.35	.595
There is sport facilities in the hotel	SD12	19%	26%	29%	26%	418	2.75	1.502
The hotel is in a quiet and clean atmosphere	SD13	61%	35%	3%	2%	438	1.45	.637
The rooms are spacious	SD14	47%	41%	6%	6%	425	1.72	.845
There is personalizedservice offered to customers	SD15	36%	47%	14%	3%	438	1.83	.776
Bathroom fittings,water, sanitation are working	SD16	55%	36%	2%	8%	438	1.62	.855
Hotel accommodation details are available in the website	SD17	36%	34%	19%	11%	425	2.05	0.999
The hotel website is opened regularly	SD18	31%	34%	25%	11%	432	2.15	.988
Picture and video chips of hotel are available	SD19	36%	34%	19%	11%	425	2.05	.999
Easy online booking options	SD20	29%	42%	17%	12%	432	2.12	.976
Easy payment option	SD21	44%	44%	5%	8%	438	1.76	.860
Accept debit, credit and international cards	SD22	39%	35%	12%	14%	438	2.00	1.038
Fully computerized services	SD23	25%	40%	19%	16%	418	2.25	1.015
Online feedback system	SD24	18%	39%	29%	15%	412	2.40	.949
Hotel classification determine the types of customers a hotel attract	SD25	34%	52%	11%	3%	432	1.83	.741

The facilities in the hotel matches the standard level of service	SD26	36%	55%	5 %	5 %	425	1.78	.745
The hotel is unique in its products	SD27	42%	48%	9 %	2 %	432	1.71	.701
Staff are able to differentiate business and tourism customers	SD28	34%	50%	13%	3 %	425	1.84	.761
The beds are comfortable	SD29	56%	39%	5 %	0 %	438	1.48	.588
The toilets are spacious and hygienic	SD30	47%	45%	3 %	5 %	438	1.65	.754
The hotel furnishes with basic amenities like tooth paste, soap, shampoo, towels, toilet papers	SD31	36%	52%	8 %	5 %	438	1.80	.769
Room supplied are provided (stationary, tea, coffee, drinking water etc.)	SD32	37%	35%	17%	11%	432	2.02	.992
The beds are of correct size compared to the room types	SD33	43%	48%	6 %	3 %	432	1.69	.727
The bed is clean with wash blanket	SD34	59%	36%	2 %	3 %	438	1.48	.685
The hotel has international direct dial (IDD)	SD35	36%	19%	25%	20%	392	2.31	1.163
The TV, Refrigerator, Lighting, fan, AC are in working condition	SD36	64%	26%	3 %	8 %	438	1.55	.880

Note. 'SA' = Strongly Agree (0.99 – 1.00), 'A' = Agree (1.01 – 1.99), 'D' = Disagree (2.00 – 2.99), 'SD' = Strongly Disagree (3.00 – 4.00), N = number of Valid responses and St. = Standard Deviation.
Source: fieldwork, 2022

Using the mean interpretation scale of agreement ≤ 1.99, and disagreement ≥ 2.00; Figure 1 graphically illustrates the comparison of mean values obtained from assessing the link between hotel classification and service quality as perceived by customers and hotel management (for code interpretation, e.g., 'SD1', 'SD2', etc.; see, Table 1 and 2. Thus, it is evident that majority of the variables responsible for the link between hotel classification and the service quality of hotels in Jos are positively perceived by both the hotel management and customers within similar spectrum of observation (i.e., agreement and disagreement). Except for SD17, SD19, and SD22; where, customers disagree with the hotel management, stating that majority of hotel's 'accommodation details are not available in their websites' (mean value; customer = 2.05, management = 1.86), 'picture and video chips of hotel are not available' (mean value; customer = 2.05, management = 1.86), and that they 'do not have fully computerized services' (mean value = 2.25, management = 1.90).
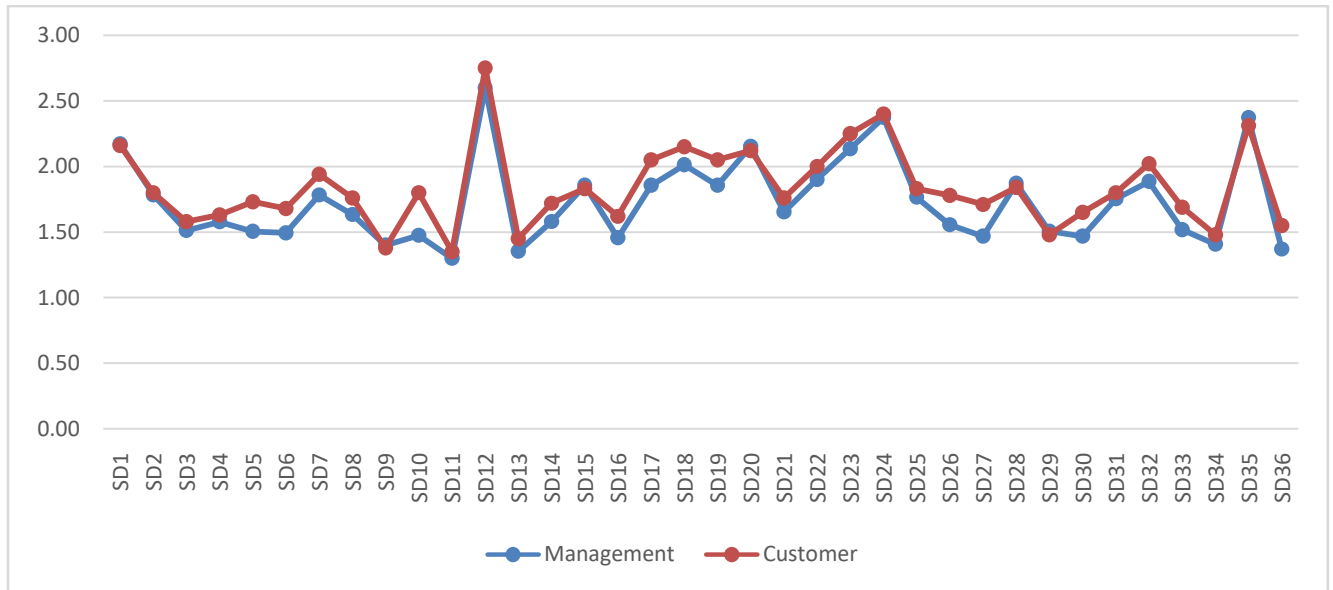
Figure 1. Comparative mean assessment of the link between hotel classification and service quality (Hotel management and customer respondents)
Source: fieldwork, 2022

In order to test for the relationship between the three variables; Service Quality (SQ), Hotel Classification and Grading (CG) and adopted Classification Strategies (CS) previously established, spearman rank correlation was utilized. Hence, Table 3, shows the results of correlation between SQ, CG, and CS.

Table 3: Nonparametric Correlation between CS, CG, and SQ

		C	S	C	G	S	Q
		M g t .	**Cust.**	**Mgt.**	**Cust.**	**Mgt.**	**Cust.**
Classification Strategies (CS)	C o e f .	1 . 0 0 0	1.000				
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
Hotel Classification and Grading (CG)	C o e f .	. 5 7 0 **	.840**	1.000	1.000		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	. 0 0 0	.000				
Service Quality (SQ)	C o e f .	. 5 2 2 **	.679**	.830**	.840**	1.000	1 . 0 0 0
	Sig. (2-tailed)	. 0 0 0	.000	.000	. 0 0 0		

Source: fieldwork, 2022

Given that a p-value less than 0.05 confidence level and a positive correlation coefficient is consistent across all correlations; the alternative hypothesis was accepted for all correlated relationships.

From the hotel management's perception; there is enough evidence to suggest that the fairly moderate (p-value = .570) positive relationship between hotel classification/grading and classification strategies adopted by hotel management is statistically significant. The fairly moderate (p-value = .522) positive relationship between service quality and classification strategies adopted by hotel management is also statistically significant. Finally, the fairly

strong (p-value = .830) positive relationship between service quality and hotel classification/grading is statistically significant.

From the hotel customer's perception; there is enough evidence to suggest that the fairly strong (p-value = .840) positive relationship between hotel classification/grading and classification strategies adopted by hotel management is statistically significant. The moderate (p-value = .679) positive relationship between service quality and classification strategies adopted by hotel management is also statistically significant. Finally, the fairly strong (p-value = .840) positive relationship between service quality and hotel classification/grading is statistically significant.

In conclusion, this study reveals that there is enough evidence to suggest that there is significant relationship (interchangeably) between Service Quality (SQ), Hotel Classification and Grading (CG) and adopted Classification Strategies (CS).

Role of Agencies in Hotel Grading and Classification

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Agency Respondents

An assessment of the socio-demographic characteristics of Agencies related to hotels in Jos, Plateau State using simple descriptive statistics was utilized in this section, as illustrated by table 4. These socio-demographic characteristics include gender, age, working experience, and educational qualification of respondents from the study agencies.

Table 4. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Agency Respondents

Characteristic/Variable	Variable	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	19	61.3%
	Female	12	38.7%
	Total =	**31**	**100.0%**
Age	18 - 30	4	12.9%
	31 - 44	8	25.8%
	More than 44	19	61.3%
	Total =	**31**	**100.0%**
Working Experience	6 - 10 years	6	19.4%
	11 - 15 years	4	12.9%
	16 - 20	3	9.7%
	More than 20 years	18	58.1%
	Total =	**31**	**100.0%**
Educational Qualification	ND	17	54.8%
	HND/BSc	10	32.3%
	MSc	4	12.9%

	Total =	3	1	1	0	0	.	0	%

Source: fieldwork, 2022

The study revealed the results that 61.3% of the management respondents were Male, while the remaining 38.7% were female (see table 4); this is to say that majority of the respondents amongst the totality of the agency staff respondents are male at a ratio of one female is found in three male agency staff of Jos, Plateau State.

An assessment of the most prominent agency staff age category found in agencies revealed that, staff with ages above 44 were the most prominent (i.e., 61.3% of the total number of agency staff respondents). Other age ranges were either between 18 – 30 or 31 – 44 years of age (i.e., 12.9% and 25.8% respectively). Therefore, advance aged agency staff are the most prominent staff that work with agencies related to hotel operation in Jos.

A working experience greater than 20 years in service was found prominent amongst staff respondents (i.e., 58.1% of the total number of agency staff respondents). Others include 6 – 11, 12 – 15, and 17 – 20 years of service (i.e., 19.4%, 12.9%, and 9.7% respectively). Hence, it can be stated that the content of this research study with relation to the role agencies in the operation of hotels in Jos will be established on the strength of experienced respondents.

Thus, even though these agency respondents are versed in experience, majority (i.e., 54.8% of the total number of agency staff respondents) are only National Diploma (ND) certified, educationally. Other educational qualifications include; Higher National Diploma (HND) or Bachelor of Science (BSc) and Master of Science (MSc); i.e., 32.3% and 12.9% respectively. Hence, this study has revealed that given the educational qualification of agency staff in Jos, majority of the agency staff have experienced working with hotels practically than theoretically via the setting of a class room.

Summary of findings

The hotel industry has grown in prominence and plays a role in fostering tourism and local economic development at the destination.Despite its immense contributions and rapid expansion of the hotel industry in Nigeria, the hotel industry has faced some challenges in recent years. There has not been a national rating program to demonstrate the tangible and intangible characteristics of a hotel property and demonstrate its value to consumers. The Nigerian hotel classification emanated from the need to guarantee a uniform standard of accommodation to encourage and facilitate the joint promotion of tourism products in West Africa. The concept of hotel classification and grading hinges on standardizing the quality of service offered by hotels establishment based on the available facilities.

This study investigated the impact of hotel classification and grading system on hotel service quality as perceived by hotel managers and customers as well as relevant stakeholders in the industry. It analyzed the classification, grading, and customer perception of hotel service quality in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. The study reveals that hotel management is learned in their field of practice and prospective professionalism with long years of experience which position them as competent to handle the hotel business. In this study, it was found that a good location that is easy to access, secure, and with ample parking spaces is very important for customer satisfaction. It was also found that customers perceive the majority of the elements of hotel service quality as satisfactory with respect to infrastructure, experience, and staff quality except for the non-availability or inadequacy of some facilities such as swimming pool, sports, gym, spa, and internet connection. The study was able to identify the Local Government Ministry of Environment, Plateau Environment Protection and Safety

Agency (PEPSA), Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC), Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC), and Plateau State Tourism Corporation (PSTC) as the relevant agencies saddled with the responsibility of supervision, regulation and operations of hotel service in Jos, Plateau State Nigeria.

Conclusion

The study explored the influence of the hotel rating structure on hotel facility quality. The findings have demonstrated that hotel rating structure or system has positive tendencies on the quality of the hotel service as narrated by the respondents. The study also reveals that the rating system also poses a huge impact on the star ratings of various hotels. This discovery offers evidence of complementation of the hotel rating system. It was established that location, employee expertise, and quality of amenities are all important factors in hotel grading and classifications. At a three-star rating level and above, quality of services and infrastructures were found to be key determinants for customer satisfaction. The variances in opinions amongst administrators of diverse star classification hotels are also recognized by Briggs's (2014) research on Scottish hotels which found that there is no agreement among hotels in the determination of hotel service excellence. The diverse areas identified from this study that have a momentous control on hotel service quality also contribute to the general client experience. As established in the work that the hotel rating system has a constructive influence on the hotel facility quality, it is expedient therefore that the hotel rating system is seriously and adequately attended to by hotels and other relevant stakeholders in the industry. Nonetheless, the system requires total overhauling in order to attain international standards and best practices so as to improve its measure for allotting grading and classifications to the hotels. The study, therefore, identified varied explanations of the hotel industry whose grading fluctuates with diverse people. In relation to the study, hotel grading and classifications in Jos, Plateau State Nigeria is not in conformation with international standards whereas the regulatory agencywith this responsibility has not been proactive in its mandate.

Recommendation for Administrators

1. It is recommended that hotel management first and foremost know and understand the criteria needed for achieving hotel grading and classifications as these expectations can be set by hotel rating schemes on the websites of hotels, online travel agencies, and relevant authorities.

2. In order to maintain an outstanding hotel customer service team, management should ensure that all employees are neat, professional, and well-trained. Each new employee needs adequate induction so they become accustomed to the hotel culture and values, as well as empowered to become valued members of the team.

3. A rewarding and recognition program for employees, as well as informing employees about every aspect of service on a daily basis, should be set up to achieve customer service satisfaction.

4. Furthermore, management should implement training programs on customer service and the implications for both managers and employees - Examples drawn from real-life situations should be used.

5. The hotel rating system should also be integrated into the curriculum of hotel schools and training facilities for managers, owners, and staff to ensure that they are familiar with it and fully understand it.

6. More importantly, both the relevant authorities as well as the Hotel Owners Association are required to inspect the hotels regularly to ensure that standards are maintained. This will empower all stakeholders to become involved and provide a monitoring system over time.

7. In addition, attention should be paid to the negative scores for service quality, since it was shown in this study that service quality significantly influenced customer satisfaction.

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