A HOLISTIC EVALUATION FRAMEWORK FOR INBOUND TOUR OPERATOR SERVICE QUALITY IN CAMEROON

by

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the subject

Management Studies

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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December 2021

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I declare that "**A holistic evaluation framework for inbound tour operator service quality in Cameroon"** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted are indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at UNISA for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

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Eyong Ayuk Ako-Ebot Date: 15 December 2021

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Completing this thesis was no easy task. I owe many people and institutions words of gratitude for their substantial contributions in the completion of this Doctor of Philosophy thesis. I will start by thanking Almighty Jehovah Ez-lami (God is my strength), for his grace, power, courage, wisdom and strength to take on this PhD research. Truly the words of Phil. 4:13 “I can do all things through Christ Jesus who gives me strength” is my testimony.

I thank very specially Prof. Marios Sotiriadis and Prof. Cina Van Zyl, my supervisors for being very patient with me and relentlessly following me up till the end to ensure that I obtain this degree. I am grateful for your enthusiasm, directives, academic wisdom, advice, deep technical insight, and gentle communication exchanges we had throughout my study period. You both did your job as supervisors very well. I respect your personality, integrity, knowledge as well as experience, and I hope in the future to copy your exemplary attitude. God truly bless you.

To the University of South Africa (UNISA), department of applied management research ethics review committee DAMS RERC Committee, thank you for approving my application for ethical clearance. To Dr Dion van Zyl, thank you for the statistical analysis. I also thank the technical and language editing expert for fine-tuning my work. A big thank you to all who participated in one way or another either by responding to the online survey or participated in the interviews your honest opinions counted so much.

Thank you to the Cameroon Ministry of Tourism and Leisure for giving me an enabling environment for this study to be conducted. Finally, I thank the UNISA for granting me admission into its prestigious university for doctoral studies and for giving me the opportunity to become part of the proud UNISA alumni family. My total gratitude goes to the entire Ako-Ebot family at home and abroad for constantly pressurising and encouraging me. To my wife Tambe Hannah Bate-Epey for your spiritual & moral support and to my children Gabrielle Praise Akong, AyokTakem Pearce and Eyong Chris who always remind me of the reason I must keep working hard. You all are an immense blessing to my life.

ABSTRACT

In this era of globalisation, competition, and a global pandemic (COVID-19), the assessment of service quality is vital for the success of inbound tour operators in Cameroon. The problem of poor service quality in Cameroon, despite the country's rich touristic potential, necessitated an empirical study aimed at fashioning a service quality evaluation framework for ITOs. A sequential explanatory mixed-method design was employed in the study. Using the purposive sampling technique through the administration of online questionnaires to staff and customers of ITOs, quantitative data was collected from managers [n=12], employees [n=5] and customers [n=126]. The data collected was used to prepare in-depth semi-structured interviews with seven (7) tourism experts/professionals. A quantitative data analysis was carried out using descriptive statistics obtained through the customer and manager questionnaires. Inferential statistics regarding customers were applied to test hypotheses using the Pearson product–moment correlation while inferential statistics regarding managers were applied to test hypotheses using the Kendall rank correlation. Conversely, a qualitative data analysis was carried out using descriptive statistics and an inferential analysis was performed through the application of grounded theory. The final outcome was the identification of determinant factors of service quality in respect to TOs and the development of a service quality path model, which revealed that both customer-centric and service-centric outcomes must be combined to achieve comprehensive service quality evaluation objectives that will lead to the attainment of the satisfaction zone. The main contributions of this study were academic and practical in nature. From an academic perspective, this study provided more insight into the existing relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. Hence, theoretical development occurred by integrating the dimensions of the TO service quality evaluation model and the SERVQUAL model with service quality evaluation. From a practical perspective, this study led to the formulation of an integrated operational system that TOs and service marketers can adopt to enhance service quality.

Keywords: service quality; assessment framework; inbound tour operator; Cameroon; service quality path model; tourism.

OPSOMMING

In hierdie era van globalisering, mededinging en ’n globale pandemie (COVID-19), is die assessering van diensgehalte deurslaggewend tot die sukses van inkomende toeroperateurs in Kameroen. ’n Empiriese studie wat daarop gemik is om ’n diensgehalte-evalueringsraamwerk vir inkomende toeroperateurs te modelleer is genoodsaak deur die probleem van diens van ’n swak gehalte in Kameroen in weerwil van die land se ryk toeristiese potensiaal.’n Sekwensiële, verklarende gemengdemetode-ontwerp is vir die onderhawige studie aangewend. Kwantitatiewe data is versamel deur die doelbewuste steekproefnemingstegniek te gebruik. Die tegniek is deur middel van aanlynvraelyste aan personeel en kliënte van inkomende toeroperateurs, naamlik, bestuurders [n=12], werknemers [n=5] en kliënte [n=126] geadministreer. Die data wat ingesamel is, is gebruik om deurtastende, semigestruktureerde onderhoude met sewe (7) kundige/professionele persone uit toerisme geledere voor te berei. Kwantitatiewe dataontleding is uitgevoer deur die gebruik van deskriptiewe statistiek wat uit die kliënt- en bestuurdervraelyste verkry is. Inferensiële statistiek oor kliënte is aangewend om hipoteses te toets deur die Pearson produk-momentkorrelasie te gebruik, onderwyl inferensiële statistiek oor bestuurders aangewend is om hipoteses deur middel van die Kendall-rangkorrelasie te toets. Omgekeerd, is ’n kwalitatiewe dataontleding deur die gebruik van deskriptiewe statistiek uitgevoer, en ’n inferensiële ontleding is uitgevoer deur die aanwending van die kennisteorie. Die vernaamste resultaat was die identifisering van diensgehalte-determinantfaktore ten opsigte van toeroperateurs en die ontwikkeling van ’n model vir ’n diensgehaltebaan wat onthul het dat beide kliëntgesentreerde en diensgesentreerde-uitkomste gekombineer moet word om omvattende diensgehalte-evalueringsdoelwitte te verkry wat in die verwerwing van die voldoeningsone sal afloop. Die hoofbydraes van hierdie studie was akademies en prakties van aard. Vanuit ’n akademiese perspektief het die studie meer insig na die bestaande verhouding tussen die onafhanklike veranderlikes en die afhanklike veranderlike gebied. Gevolglik het teoretiese ontwikkeling plaasgevind deur die dimensies van die toeroperateur-diensgehalte-evalueringsmodel en die SERVQUAL-model met diensgehalte-evaluering te integreer. Vanuit ’n praktiese perspektief, het hierdie studie aanleiding gegee tot die formulering van ’n geïntegreerde bedryfstelsel wat toeroperateurs en diensbemarkers kan aanneem ten einde diensgehalte te versterk.

Sleutelwoorde: diensgehalte; assesseringsraamwerk; inkomende toeroperateur; Kameroen; diensgehaltebaan-model; toerisme.

ISIFINYEZO ESIQUKETHE UMONGO WOCWANINGO

Kulesi sikhathi se-globalisation, ukuqhudelana kanye nobhubhane lwesifo samazwe omhlaba (i-COVID-19), uhlolo lweqophelo lamasevisi lubalulekile kwimpumelelo yama-operator ezokuvakasha e-Cameroon. Inkinga yeqophelo elingelihle lamasevisi e-Cameroon, ngisho noma kukhona umthamo ojulile wezabavakashi ubangele ukuthi kwenziwe ucwaningo olunobufakazi oluqonde ekwakheni uhlaka lwesevisi yeqophelo kubavakashi abangena ezweni. Kusetshenziswe amamethodi axubene encazelo yokulandelelana kucwaningo. Ngokusebenzisa ithekniki ye-purposive sampling ngokwenza imibuzo ebhaliwe yama-questionnaire nge-online kubasebenzi kanye namakhastama, abavakashi abangena ezweni, kuqoqwe i-quantitative data kumamininjela [n=12], abasebenzi [n=5] kanye namakhastama [n=126]. Ulwazi oluqoqiwe lusetshenziswe ukulungiselela ama-interview ajulile ama-semi-structured nochwepheshe/amaprofeshinari ezokuvakasha abangu 7. Kwenziwe uhlaziyo lolwazi ngobuningi, ngokusebenzisa i-descriptive statistics ngokwenza ama-questionnaire amakhastama kanye namamininjela. Kusetshenziswe i-inferential statistics mayelana namakhastama ukuthesta i-hypotheses ngokusebenzisa i-Pearson product–moment correlation kanti kwasetshenziswa i-inferential statistics mayelana namamininjela ukuthesta i-hypotheses ngokusebenzisa i-Kendall rank correlation. Ngakho-ke kwenziwe uhlaziyo lolwazi lwe-qualitative ngokusebenzisa i-descriptive statistics kanye nohlaziyo lwe-inferential ngokusebenzisa i-grounded theory. Inhloso enkulu bekuwukubona ama-determinant factor eqophele lesevisi mayelana nama-tour operator kanye nokwenza indlela yemodeli yeqophelo lesevisi, ekhombise ukuthi imiphumela yokuqondisa kumakhastama nokuqondisa kumasevisi kumele kuhlanganiswe ukufinyelela izinjongo zohlolo lweqophelo yesevisi ukufinyelela izinjongo zokuhlola ukujula kweqophelo lesevisi okuzoba nomphumela wokufinyelela umkhakha wokweneliseka. Umthelela omkhulu walolu cwaningo ubongowesi-akhademiki kanye nokubambeka ngokwenhlobo. Ngaso hlangothini lweze-akhademiki, lolu cwaningo luhlinzeke ngombono ojulile ngobudlelwana phakathi kwama-variable azimele kanye nama-variable ancike kokunye. Ngakho-ke ukwenziwa kwethiyori kwenzeke ngokuhlanganisa amadayamenshini emodeli yohlolo lweqophelo yesevisi yama-tour operator kanye nemodeli ye-SERVQUAL ngohlolo lweqophelo yesevisi. Ngasohlangothini lokubambekayo, lolu cwaningo luholele ekwenziweni kwesistimu ye-integrated operation yama-tour operator kanye nabamakethi bamasevisi abangawasebenzisa ukuthuthukisa iqophelo lesevisi.

Amagama abalulekile: iqopheloi sesevisi; uhlaka lokuhlola; ama-operator abavakashi abangena ezweni; i-Cameroon; i-service quality path model; ezokuvakasha.

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ANOR	Standards and Quality Agency Cameroon
ASQ	American Society of Quality
BBRS	Bloomberg Business Week Research Services
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
CEMAC	Central African Monetary and Economic Community
COVID-19	Corona virus disease
DMO	Destination Management Organization
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GFK	Gesellschaft für Konsumforschung
IATA	International Air Transport Agency
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IPA	Importance-Performance Analysis
IQR	Inter-Quartile Range
ISO	International Standards Organisation
ITO	Inbound Tour Operator
ITOSQUAL	Inbound Tour Operator Service Quality Assessment
MINTOUL	Ministry of Tourism and Leisure
MSI	Marketing Science Institute
OTO	Outbound Tour Operator
SERVPERF	Service Performance
SERVQUAL	Measuring Service Quality instrument
SPI	Service Performance Index
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
SQ	Service Quality
SQI	Service Quality Index
TO	Tour Operator
TQM	Total Quality Management

TTCI	Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index
UEAC	Central African Economic Union
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on trade and development
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNISA	University of South Africa
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VIF	Tolerance and Variance inflation factor
WTTC	World Travel and Tourism Council

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DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

I. SERVICE:

According to Kotler and Keller (2012) (cited in Puri & Singh 2018:746) service was an intangible action carried out via a medium as an organization’s offer to gain customers. The American Marketing Association defined services as “activities, benefits or satisfaction that are offered for sale or provided in connection with the sale of goods” (cited by Kapoor et al., 2011:10). In another definition by McColl-Kennedy (2003:3) services are defined simply as “acts, performances and experiences”. For this study, services offered to the customer would focus on the actions and performances by the service provider, as well as the customer experience after the service was delivered.

II. QUALITY:

Puri & Singh (2018:746) stated that according to Gitlow et al. (1989) quality was the extent to which the customers or users believe the product or service surpasses their needs and expectations”. The difference between the customer's expectation and the perception of the tour operator (TO) services such as hotel, nutrition, and transport in an all-inclusive package (Gitonga, 2021: xi). According to the International Standards Organization (ISO, 2017), quality was defined as “the degree to which a set of inherent characteristics of an object fulfill requirements”. Considering this study, quality was the ability of a TO service to satisfy the customer’s need in a clear manner.

III. EVALUATION:

According to Harvey (2017:1) an evaluation described activities such as to monitor, to assess, to audit, to endorse or to accredit something. An evaluation was regarded as one obtaining and analyzing information via a process in an orderly manner so as to provide valuable feedback. Quality evaluation was about assessing and judging as acceptable the level of quality (Harvey, 2017:1). Two types of evaluations: the formative and the summative. The formative evaluation assessed how to leverage a program its implementation quality in terms of personnel input, organizational context and procedures. Meanwhile with the summative evaluation, the focus was on the consequence of the delivery process of the program as it examined the effects or outcomes. (William, 2006:1). For this study, evaluation will center on identifying and measuring the existing gap between perception and expectation of service rendered to customers by TO service providers in Cameroon.

IV. FRAMEWORK:

This was a backbone skeleton that underlie a research that led to the achievement of the aim, objectives and hypotheses in the context of this study. A framework was a concept build up, pulled together, and schematised to give some map form in a research (Liehr & Smith, 2009). According to Dwivedi (2008), a framework represents movement in a sure and concise way making the research objectives to be clear, simple, and focused (Punch, 2005). As an essential component of a quantitative research, a framework tries to explain the research questions (Collis & Hussey, 2003; Punch, 2005). Through a framework, every irrelevant information was discarded (Dwivedi, 2008) as well as throw light to what was known and thought of concerning the topic being researched (Punch, 2005).

V. SERVICE QUALITY:

One of the founding fathers in service quality studies, Parasuraman et al. (1988:15) defined service quality as a behavioural pattern in which there was a perception and expectation match of the customer’s performance. Another prominent author Zeithaml (1988:3) defined service quality as the evaluation of a customer’s standing compared to others and further states that services were complex to assess as they required many admittance attributes and mostly revolved around the customer. Service quality depended on what each customer perceived and not the standard a service was perceived to have. Many evaluation of service quality studies were carried out where TOs established the maintenance for the execution of better service quality (Puri & Singh, 2018). In this study the main focus was on the identification and evaluation of the service quality factors as well as dimensions pertaining to the TO industry in Cameroon.

VI. SERVICE QUALITY EVALUATION:

The assessment of a service was the difference between the expectation and the perception (Nguya, Kariuki & Muthengi, 2021:153). Service quality evaluation came into play when the service encounter occurred the moment the customer made an appraisal and the satisfaction level derived after a set of attitudes have occurred among the service provider and the one consuming or buying the services. In this study, the measurement of service quality took into account the difference between the expectation and the perception in a TO enterprise using the SERVQUAL model which comprised of the following dimensions: reliability, assurance, tangibility, responsiveness and empathy (Abam, 2019).

VII. INBOUND TOUR OPERATOR:

A TO was a major industry player in the tourism supply chain, as they acted as a bridge linking the customer (tourist) and the touristic site. In his definition of a TO, Atilgan et al. (2003:415) asserted that it was "the chief service provider who was responsible for delivering and/or contracting and monitoring the promised service mix, including all arrangements such as flights, transportation, hotel, excursions, and guidance throughout the service delivering period". ITO centred on customers from other countries. The ITO always tried to find out what the motives and needs of customers from other destinations were so as to reshape and redirect their services and products to suit their needs (USAID 2007:6).

VIII. CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

This was a kind of business construct within the service industry. The quality assessment goal as well as objective was to provide optimum customer satisfaction. The theory surrounding the customer's perception of service quality was somewhat connected to customer satisfaction. In real life, both customer satisfaction and service quality was transposed for the other. Past studies have reported existing connection among customer satisfaction and service quality. According to Anderson and Sullivan (1993), customer satisfaction was dependent on past customer experiences alongside the price, while service quality was not dependent on past experience and price. Oliver (1980) was the founder of the expectancy disconfirmation theory. To many researchers in the service industry, this theory was the bedrock for the conceptualisation of customer satisfaction. He further suggested in the theory that the variation in the expectation and perception performance determined to what degree a customer obtained satisfaction. Zeithaml et al. (1996) posited that the service provider acting as the supplier was supposed to meet and even surpass the norms and expectations of the customer for a positive customer satisfaction level to be established.

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

According to the World Bank, the service industry has seen a global increase in the economy of developing countries. Within the past three decades contributing an average 55% of the GDP and 45% in terms of employment opportunities (Nayyar, Mary & Elwyn, 2021). Global competition in the services industry has shaped a great deal customers’ preferences and profiles for quality services. Owing to globalisation coupled with high competitiveness, service providers such as TO businesses are drastically changing most especially in developing countries. Customers’ perceptions and expectations are challenging TOs to create other innovative ways of improving service quality (Alotaibi, 2015). Nowadays, customers are more globally oriented, exposed to different cultures and have developed new ideas and viewpoints towards the kind of services they prefer. As a result, the customer’s role had contributed enormously to the innovation in the marketing field owing to a shift in focus to the customer because in the tourism jargon, it is often said “the customer is king”. With this growing competition and shift in focus, expectations of customers have become more specific, and they seek service providers that will satisfy and even surpass their expectations through the provision of quality service.

Industry practitioners and scholars the world over consider service quality as very important because the travel and tourist industry stands as a gigantic business empire. According to Atilgan, Akinci and Aksoy (2003:418), service within the tourism industry was particularly important because of its susceptibility to the topic of service quality and should be treated with consideration. Of course, this was seen in today’s changing business world as delivery of high service quality which was undeniably the key differentiator among tourist business rivals. This assertion was further supported by Pilelienė and Simkus (2012:102) where they said providing high service quality gave that exceptional competitive advantage that determined the subsequent decision of a customer and the imminent success of a business.

Come to think of it, the question that comes to mind was how could one determine and assess the service quality of a TO company given that there was a shift in focus towards the customer? According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988), the process by which customers evaluate a service was important especially to service marketers as the manner through which they decide involves fewer quality measures objectives. Hence, practitioners in the service industry as well as previous studies carried out by researchers moved towards understanding how customers assess service quality in an inclusive tour package (Chand & Ashish, 2014). It was, therefore, imperative for a TO and any tourism business to note that understanding, achieving and maintaining high service quality provided that successful link between the organisation and its customers (Darfoon, 2013:3) through evaluation and proper management.

Among the many empirical and conceptual studies conducted in service marketing, an important area worthy of note was about service quality evaluation (Abam, Prince & Njila, 2020:1; Atilgan et al., 2003:417). Service quality assessment was viewed as the major point when it came to experience-based victory in businesses such as recreation, tourism, and hospitality (Abam et al., 2020; Pyo, 2007; Saleh & Ryan, 1991; Lewis & Chambers, 1989). The topic on service quality assessment was increased more often in tourism research as well as literature on leisure and recreation (Crompton et al., 1991 cited in Hudson et al., 2004:306). Studies within the tourist industry showed less comprehensive research was conducted about service quality evaluation (Chadee & Mattsson, 1996) and particularly far less in the TO industry (Hudson & Shephard, 1998).

Acknowledgment of the importance and positive effects from good quality service provision had critical importance in the TO industry because it all centred on the customer. The provision in the TO industry of good service quality was of prime essence in obtaining sustainable competitive edge in the volatile tourism marketplace. Therefore, to successfully understand service quality in a highly competitive TO industry, an assessment study was required to understand the customer service expectation and perception thereby advancing one's understanding of the theory and measures to improve the service quality being offered by service providers, especially TOs. The next sub-section would introduce and discuss the role and challenges of ITOs.

1.1.1 Background to the study

According to the travel and tourism competitiveness report (2019), tourism within Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has huge economic and financial potential, offering key economic comparative advantage for African countries and more especially Cameroon which had natural touristic endowments to generate wealth. Despite these potentials, SSA was at the bottom of the Travel, Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI). Because of poor service quality and low levels of customer care within the ITO industry in SSA, improving the quality infrastructure was essential for meeting performance standards (UNCTAD, 2017:160). Hence, there was absolute need to improve the service perception of customers and ITOs were prepared to revisit their service offerings through regular service quality assessments.

Cameroon adopted the slogan “All of Africa in one country” due to its rich, diverse, cultural, and ethnic disposition (Takor, 2021). Reason why it is believed that visiting Cameroon is visiting Africa as a whole. The tourism industry in Cameroon for over the years, was growing but at a relatively slow raate. The government of Cameroon had long created the ministry of tourism as far back as 1970. The government also played a vital role by encouraging local and international investors who wished to invest in hotels, travel agencies, and airlines. The wildlife of Cameroon attracts both big-game hunters and safari-goers, since the country stands out as home for many of the continent's iconic animals such as, cheetahs, chimpanzees, elephants, giraffes, gorillas, hippopotami, and rhinoceroses (Takor, 2021). The country's poor transport infrastructure was one of the major holdbacks for the tourism industry. The government under the former president Amadou Ahidjo had long (1974) put in place programs to help increase and encourage tourism in Cameroon. The president gave a special status to the tourism industry and established the “General Commissariat of Tourism). By the year 1975, the president reconstituted the tourism organ as “Delegation for Tourism", whose aim or function was to attract and encourage investors to invest in airlines, hotels, travel agencies and TOs. (Longley, 2020).

The TO industry in developing countries like Cameroon had put in much effort to improve soft and human factors in service quality (Saner 2015:21) within its marketing micro environment and macro environment (Kotler, Bowen, and Makens, 2010:86). In a world being moved by digitalisation, the TO whose role was seen as intermediary was compromised. Customers of tourist products and services believed they can directly contact facilities for their services and obtain the best deals. Meanwhile a TO was an accredited wholesaler of such services with several facilities like hotels, transport companies, airlines etc. According to Cooper et al., (1998:189), TOs occupied a major and decisive part through the process of tourists consuming services such as transportation, hotel, nutrition etc. before, during and after a service in the tourism distribution and value chain. They significantly influence directly or indirectly, the customer behaviour had a way to control tourist's hotel, transport as well as visit to tourist sites.

The intermediary role of TOs was one which brought together, suppliers (hotels, airlines, restaurants etc.) and the final customer. They are important connectors and creators of markets where products as well as services were bought and sold (Tourism Notes, 2021). In many industries, the conversion of goods and services not needed by customers to something that they want was the job of intermediaries (Cooper et al., 1998:189). Therefore, as intermediaries, providing and maintaining quality service on both sides cannot be overemphasised. For instance, if the supplier provided a bad service to the customer, it negatively affected the TO who connected both together. Likewise, if a customer appreciated the services of a supplier, it was positively translated to the TO.

In general terms, a TO sells tour packages comprising leisure and entertainment activities, hotel, transportation, food, and beverage as an all-in-one product at a particular price to the customer (Sheldon 1986). Two types of TOs exist: outbound tour operator (OTOs) and inbound tour operator (ITOs).

The OTOs are promoters of tours designed for multi-nationals and usually for long haul tourists wishing to experience an overseas destination (Daniel 2017:32). These tours usually presented as a package are sold to both individuals and groups of tourists in a country going to another country. It could also be sold to several countries for a defined period. OTOs design their own tours even though they had to partner with local operators at a destination for the smooth execution of the service provided. They could otherwise modify and re-sell to customers' already existing tour packages at that destination. For an OTO to be successful, there has to be a deep understanding concerning the needs of the customer; so, the package was designed and tailored accordingly which is the inverse of the ITO.

The ITO was also referred to as a destination management company (DMC) or a ground operator (Daniel 2017:33). It significantly played the role to oversee a service well executed. They are the local professionals at a destination for a given touristic product. They had received foreign tourists coming from other countries. ITOs prepare individual and collective tour packages in partnership with TOs abroad and export them out using distributors. According to Daniel (2017:33), some of the general services provided by ITOs included hotel, transportation, leisure and sightseeing, food and beverage, currency exchanges and insurance services. The services of an ITO are sought by tourists in that country who do not master the destination. Though ITOs focused on selling a destination in the country where it was present, sometimes they sell well-known destinations outside that country. According to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (2007), for ITOs to be effective in their service provision, they must have an existing product in demand that offers good monetary value to the customer in the target market and with a timely and delivery product period that respects good quality standards, was readily available and lead to a unique experience.

ITOs cooperate with principals (companies or individuals) to supply tour package services. Service suppliers provide hotel, catering and transport services. The position of ITO on the tourism distribution chain was demonstrated by figure 1. The ITO and the different suppliers enter into a formal contract where suppliers rent out their facilities at a price while the ITO sells those services. International ITOs are retailers who are intermediaries that help the ITO in terms of promotion, sales and even distribution of tour packages (Jensen 2009:135). ITOs had certain functions peculiar to it. ITOs design and sell integrated tour packages including logistics, entertainments, and sightseeing (Law & Buhalis, 2021).

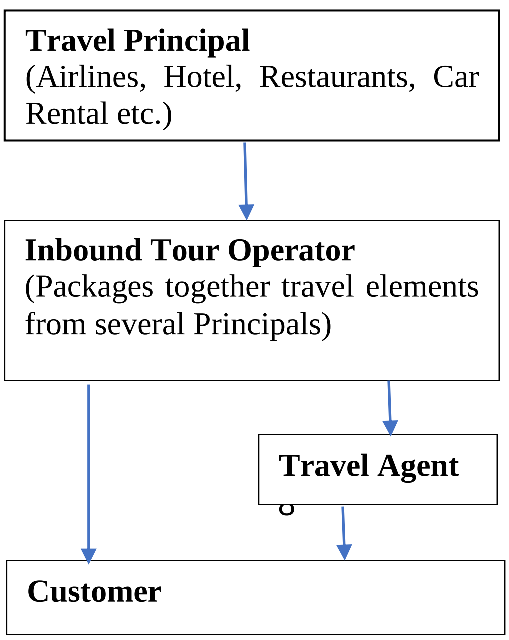


Figure 1: The ITO position in the distribution chain.
(Adapted from Holloway et al. 2009)

Service production centres around some pertinent points such as evaluation of the expectations and needs of the customer; conduct an inventory and take stock of the assets present at destinations; look into the future on the perception of service quality in the ITO; selected and worked closely with local logistics partners to provide hotel, ground transport; in an all-inclusive tour package (Law & Buhalis, 2021; Mei, 2014).

Moreover, ITOs played a vital part in the promotion and sales of the image of the destination they are marketing. But what was this destination image? It reflected the customers' perceptions, but the challenge was bringing to reality this image of the mind. This was the work of destination marketers and other touristic organisations had faced and worked on (Shani & Wan, 2011 cited in Rheal, 2016:21).

For an ITO to market a destination, it must understand and use the existing opportunities. Some of these opportunities included product, geographical location, diplomatic and democratic status of the country, accessibility to the destination, connectivity to the destination, facilities, and amenities presents at that destination, the destination image, the human resources available at the destination, and the business climate as well as the investment regime (Daniel, 2017:34).

Another crucial point for the success of ITOs vis-à-vis service quality assessment was to understand how the tourism distribution chain functioned for instance when it concerned commissions, respecting and responding to booking requests within a short response time as well as handling complaints from customers so that good service quality was delivered.

1.1.2 Contemporary challenges faced by Inbound Tour Operator

The change in paradigm from mass tourism to a more individual kind of tourism was at the centre of the weak consideration being given to ITOs. According to Poon (1993), such a change was described as a transition from the past to the present form of tourism. The past tourism form referred to tourism undertaken by inexperienced tourists with predictable customer behaviour centred on the 4S (sun, sex, sand, and sea) experience. Conversely, the so-called present tourism form was one involving experienced tourists having growing concern for sustainability issues (environmental impact awareness at destinations). The “new” tourism is about obtaining unique and memorable experiences, which are much more personalised. Though these tourism forms co-exist, the “new” tourism offers better opportunities in tourism.

ITOs have a powerful position in the tourism distribution chain. As intermediaries, they have the responsibility of balancing and maintaining their relationship between suppliers and tourists. According to Cloquet (2013:659), some authors such as Jensen (2009) and Van der Duim and Caalders (2008) mentioned that the behaviour of ITOs depends on the particular requirements coming from both demand sides. In areas where tourist influx was low, ITOs must face a big risk and sometimes make decisions that are uncertain (Cloquet, 2013:660). From the supplier side, ITOs must show that they are in a reliable and worthwhile partnership by making available to them more tourist customers. From the customer side, ITOs must continually present new and exciting packages that always bring new and old customers, a task which was not easy to handle.

Another challenge faced by ITOs was the difficult profiling of customers. This arises because most of the employees are not well trained. Most have informal training or come from other backgrounds that do not exactly fit the skill sets for the job role. Hence, the employees would not be able to appropriately handle customer needs. This scenario will help push away the customer to find a better serviceable ITO or do an internet search.

Far less attention was given to research on service quality especially in Central African Monetary and Economic Community (CEMAC) probably because ITOs are thought to be phasing out. However, previous literatures on studies conducted in CEMAC had added to the understanding of the tourism channel distribution structure. Scholars have therefore suggested that future research could focus on looking at the complete tourism supply chain from customers (tourists) to industry service suppliers (Cloquet 2013:660). The next sub-section will delve on presenting the service quality evaluation models that exist and are applied in previous studies.

1.1.3 Service Quality Evaluation Models

The theoretical background of any study was the framework guide for any research composed of principles, concepts, constructs as well as tenants of a theory (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). The theoretical framework acts as a blueprint founded on extant theories in that field of study. The research student applied this framework in his study to respond to the research problem identified. Some authors such as Fulton and Krainovich-Miller (2010) asserted that the theoretical framework was like a map. Furthermore, Brondizio, Leemans and Solecki (2014) highlight that the frameworks are related theories that are valuable to a study. In the next paragraphs, the various related constructs and theories surrounding the idea of service quality evaluation was presented and discussed.

The reason behind the significance and relevance of any service quality assessment involves controlling quality while improving the way a customer perceives service quality as a crucial outcome from the whole process of evaluation (Sayareh et al., 2016:204). The positive outcome of an assessment may result in the following: a loyal customer; conversion of potential customers; motivating positive comments; satisfied and committed employee; the company's image was boosted; deduction in costing as well as better output in the business venture (Berry, Bennet & Brown, 1989).

The perceived service quality paradigm in most cases was approached differently, therefore, making its understanding a puzzle, for instance the missed but on-going research attempts to apply a SERVQUAL/SERVPERF scales blend for different industries (e.g. Durvasula, Lysonski & Mehta, 1999) or carry out other studies applying the same theoretical framework (for instance Mels, Boshoff & Nel, 1997). No wander Parasuraman et al. (1994) made a call for studies to be successfully addressed, that examines specifically "dimensionality" within the service quality paradigm. For this reason, assessing service quality perceptions was among the most researched topics. Stressing the importance of the customer's perception during a service quality assessment gives good reason for one to believe why there was much focus on the topic in previous research (Adam, 2019; Ladhari, 2008).

Relevant literature since the 19th century has shown there are various measurement scales and indexes established and widely applied in academics and industrial practice showing how the service quality was analysed and/or assessed; for instance, SERVQUAL, SERVPERF, SQI, SPI and IPA (Hudson, Hudson & Miller, 2004:305). Some well-known service quality measurement models developed and commonly applied together with their authors included: the Nordic model by Grönroos (1984; 2007); SERVQUAL by Parasuraman et al. (1988); SERVPERF by Cronin and Taylor (1992); IPA (Importance-performance analysis) by Hudson, Hudson, and Miller (2004) and RENTQUAL by Ekiz, Bavik, and Arasli (2009). The Service Quality Scorecard (SQSC) was recently developed by Swart (2013) as an assessment tool par excellence in the hotel industry to determine variables that influenced service.

1.1.4 Contextualisation of study site

Literature on tourism and service quality evaluation researched in Cameroon was at its infancy stage. Tourism and research development remain an under-exploited developmental tool particularly in Cameroon despite its rich potential towards economic growth even in the CEMAC sub-region. In a study conducted by Kimbu (2010) using content analysis, it was realised that among the challenges faced by many CEMAC countries including Cameroon was the absence of research in the field of tourism. To improve the situation and according to the Cameroon National Tourism Action Plan, in August 2002 the National School of Hotel Trade and Tourism in Ngaoundere in Cameroon was restructured into a sub-regional institution. It is now called the CEMAC School for hotel trade and tourism and is among the institutions listed on the European Union specialised schools.

Another big challenge which needs immediate attention was the high rate of ignorance and the lack of basic service culture in tourism at the grassroots level. Many local communities have the tourism resources but lack the expertise to develop them to enrich their local economies. Also, there are insufficient finances being allocated to tourism activities. For instance, in Cameroon the Ministry of Tourism has the least amount in terms of the yearly budget among the other ministerial departments. Over 60% of the allocated budget focused on administration and running cost while the 40% was for the investment (Cameroon Tribune, 2019). According to Cameroon tribune (2019) report, the issue of lack of qualified professionals and absence of a well-developed curriculum in the educational sphere leaves much to be desired.

Cameroon is among the power houses in the CEMAC sub-region which has eight countries namely: Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Sao Tome and Principe and Tchad. They are commonly called countries of the Congo Basin, a natural rainforest area second to the Amazon Forest in South America and host to a huge variety of wildlife and natural ecosystems. The Central African sub-region was ranked fourth and occupied the last position compared to the other regional blocks in Africa despite showing very strong growth rates of 8% per year in tourist arrivals in 2011-2014 in the sub-region (UNCTAD, 2017). This could be partly owing to the absence of meaningful patronage from the governments of these countries that have diversified their economies in different sectors for instance agriculture, mining as well as education.

CEMAC represents a market of about 42.5 million people that cover more than 3 million square kilometres with huge natural resources (World Trade Organisation, 2013:6). According to the African Development Bank (2017) report on CEMAC countries' contribution to regional GDP, about half of this population live in Cameroon representing about 29.3% of the region's GDP. For other CEMAC countries, the percentages are as follows: Central African Republic (1.2%), Congo (10.5%), Democratic Republic of Congo (24.4%), Equatorial Guinea (10.5%), Gabon (13.2%), Sao Tome and Principe (0.3%) and Tchad (10.6%) respectively.

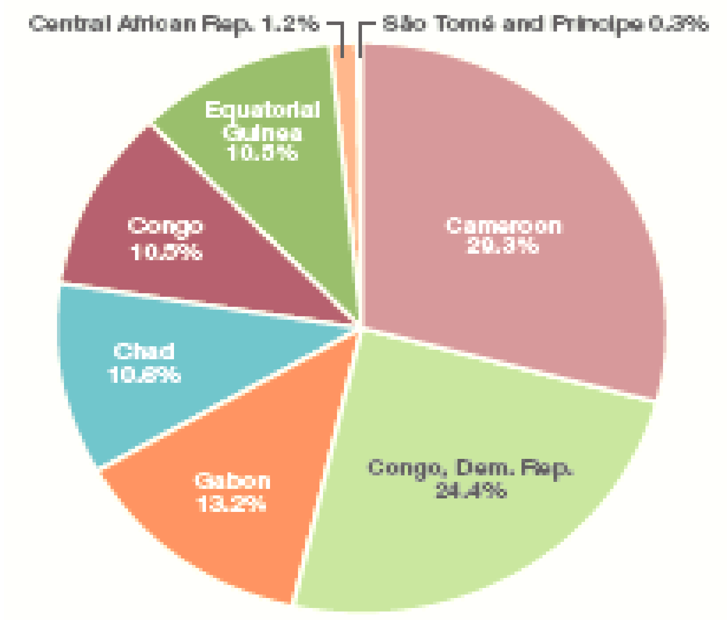


Figure 2: Contribution by countries to regional GDP in Central Africa
Source: AfDB Statistics (2017)

The tourism industry's GDP contribution in the CEMAC sub-region stands at less than 3% on average but there is hope in the horizon as projections forecast that international tourist arrivals would increase to 134 million by 2030 (UNCTAD, 2017). The resultant effect was that until recently, little attention was given to tourism research as well as its development and management in many states within the CEMAC sub-region (Kimbu, 2010). For Cameroon and CEMAC member countries to enjoy the proceeds from tourism and sustainable tourism development, more efforts are required at the level of the respective countries. According to the UNCTAD 2017 report, regional economic communities such as the CEMAC should enhance joint marketing and promotion programmes of cross border attractions and build on these efforts to establish joined infrastructural development and investment. Examining some tourism indicators showed significant disparities in research conducted in the tourism industry in the Central African sub-region and other sub-regions in Africa despite strong growth rate figures. Since the last two decades, several authors had conducted and written an increase number of research studies on tourism in Africa, its application and impact as well as its development (Weaver, 2005; Beech & Chadwick, 2006; Kimbu, 2011; Swart, 2017). However, tourism research was very rare in Cameroon and even those studies that were conducted, the implementation of the outcome and recommendations seem not to be taken into consideration. This was one of the reasons that motivated this research to be conducted and more information about this sub-region made available in literature.

It is hoped that through this study, new knowledge grounds gained with regards to how the quality service evaluation in the TO industry will enhance proper and adequate quality service management. From the findings of the study, it is hoped that it would be very persuasive to give some recommendations to TO management to improve their service quality thereby driving sales and increase business profitability. The suggested model would serve as a blueprint for ITOs' marketing strategy. More explanations were provided in Chapter 9.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The problem at hand that has precipitated this research to be conducted relates to the general feeling of dissatisfaction of customers in the TO industry linking to poor-quality service delivery by ITOs in Cameroon (Nguya et al., 2021). This problem was substantiated by a series of issues relating to TOs in Cameroon, who are faced with the problem of a rather poor or low service quality delivery in a highly competitive industry. In another study conducted in Tanzania, the tour guiding services were found to be relatively poor (Philemon, 2015). In Cameroon, the tourism industry grew so fast that it led to indigent conditions and depreciated service quality (Onomo, 2005 cited in Kamdem, 2017:11). In recent years, Cameroon has witnessed an increase in the number of arrivals which has led to the quantity versus quality debate and ultimately a phenomenon described as non-quality. Hence, the sustainability of service quality in the Cameroon tourism industry became questionable. Customer dissatisfaction was highly ascribed to poor quality service delivery in different domains and it was often highlighted in the media and widely discussed among the general public (Nchendeh, 2012:3). Nchendeh (2012:3) stated further that in the telecom service industry in Cameroon, the telecommunication regulatory board had threatened to crack down on mobile network providers if they failed to tackle the chronic problem of poor quality service. In the healthcare domain concerns are raised about poor quality of healthcare services in Cameroon despite the facilities implanted (Njong & Tchouapi, 2020). According to the SSA tourism research final report conducted in 47 countries within SSA and following results of an online survey and TO interviews, low service quality was identified as a key challenge that resulted in poor service quality (AFTFP, 2010:8). Novelli (2016) supports this point of view that Africa, particularly SSA, suffers from an inconsistent service quality. According to Shackley (2006), because of low-quality service, one cannot place neither promote nor market oneself as a sustainable destination having cultural and ecotourism capabilities in countries that attract tourist from all over the world. This was reflected in countries especially of the ECCAS, particularly Cameroon. The report published by the Commonwealth Secretariat on Cameroon tourism destination branding noted that service standards in general throughout Cameroon were considered not to be internationally competitive despite Cameroon's rich touristic potentials (Rick and Tom 2008:10). There was a general appraisal from customers of the services of ITOs of poor customer service and efforts to address this issue have turned futile.

Tourism stands out as an important contributor to Cameroon's economy and even to the CEMAC sub-region. According to Cameroon tourism statistics, there was an increase in tourism revenue since 2015, in 2017, 543 million US dollars (representing a 6.89% increase);

2016 recorded 508 million US dollars (representing a 6.72% increase); 2015 recorded 476 million US dollars (representing a 24.32% decrease). According to the WTO statistics obtained from the worlddata.info website, revenue generated from tourism in Cameroon in 2018 amounted to 681 million US dollars in receipts alone corresponding to a 1.7% of the total GDP and 63% of all international tourism receipts in the central African sub-region. Back in 1995, tourism revenue was just 75 million US dollars approximately 0.78% of the GDP but has steadily increased within the past 24 years (see Figure 3).

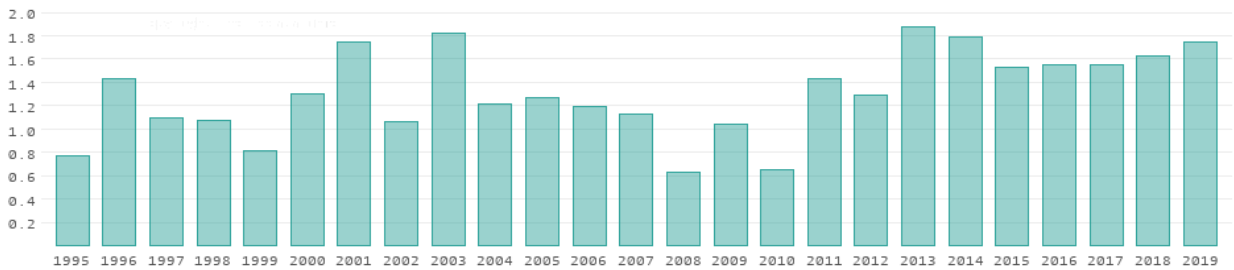


Figure 3. Cameroon tourism revenue 1995-2019
Source: World Bank (2021)

Also recorded was a steady increase from 2006 to 2018 of the number of international tourist's arrivals to Cameroon. According to the World Bank (2021), the country in 2006 recorded 477.000 international tourists and in 2018 recorded 997.000 international tourists up from the 1.081.000 tourists recorded in 2017 within its national borders ranking third in the Central African sub-region and 173rd in the world (WTO, 2021).

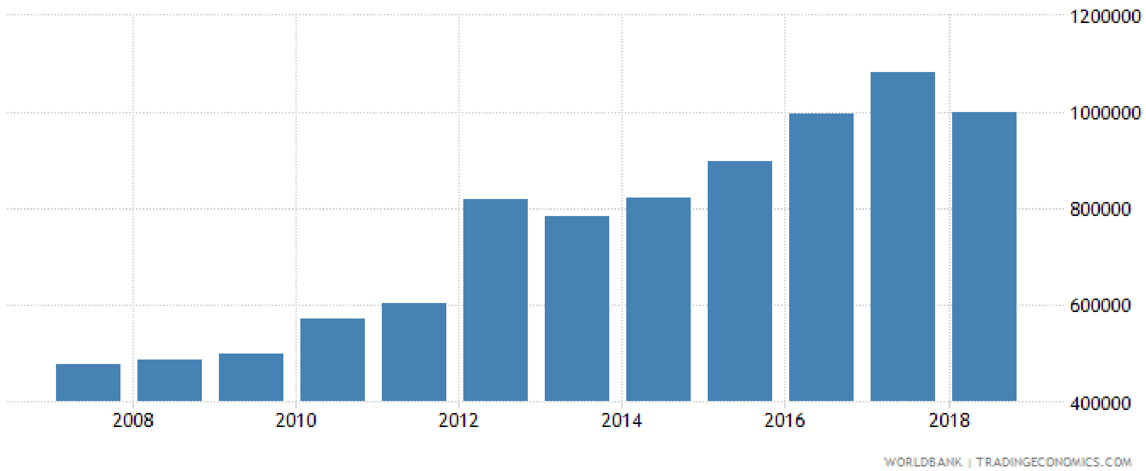


Figure 4: Cameroon-International tourist's arrivals 2008-2018.
Source: World Bank (2021)

Despite Cameroon's rich touristic potential in terms of product and service offering, its steady increase in revenue as well as international tourists' new arrivals recorded, tourism contributes to the GNP of the country, the growth change curve does not show clearly growth in the tourism industry in Cameroon therefore offering a window of opportunity for improvement.

Table 1: Cameroon's tourism revenue 2004-2018

Year	No of tourists	Difference in number of tourists / years	Tourism receipts (millions of dollars)	GDP (%)
2018	997.000	-84.000	633	1.6
2017	1.081.000	87.000	544	1.6
2016	994.000	97.000	508	1.6
2015	897.000	75.000	476	1.5
2014	822.000	39.000	629	1.8
2013	783.000	34.000	607	1.9
2012	817.000	213.000	377	1.3
2011	604.000	31.000	423	1.4
2010	573.000	75.000	171	0.65
2009	498.000	11.000	271	1.0
2008	487.000	10.000	167	0.63
2007	477.000	26.000	254	1.1
2006	451.000	275.000	231	1.2
2005	176.000	-14.000	229	1.3
2004	190.000	------------	212	1.2

Source: Authors analysis adapted from Worlddata.info

Till date, there was no officially updated tourism data for 2019, 2020 and 2021 for Cameroon from MINTOUL. From Table 1, it was evident that there existed a gap as to why the numbers of international tourists are fluctuating rather than steadily increasing as noticed with revenue within the tourism industry in Cameroon. This indicated a serious weakness in this significant giant service-oriented industry. Within the context of this study which is Cameroon and even some nations within the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), these figures could be attributed to the rather low service quality that plagued the ITO industry, which was one of the major players.

Tour operators (particularly Inbound) along the tourism value chain occupy a very important role as the principal retailers of touristic products and services of (a) destination(s) who spend large sums of money to set up / operate. TOs within the tourism industry value chain in the SSA are key players who act as important “connectors” (AFTFP, 2010:6) between service providers (airlines, hotels, car dealers etc.) and customers whose role essentially was the sales of hotel facilities, restaurants, picks and drops and leisure activities all combined into one tour package (USAID, 2007:5) prepared by the TO.

Industry practitioners and scholars have attested to the fact that the way service quality was regarded remains the key to sustainable competitiveness as it gives real value for money paid for a service. ITOs surrounded by strong competition within the tourism industry or externally from other industries are increasingly forced to put the needs and requirements of potential customers first. To attain that competitive edge, ITOs must and should always ensure the consistent delivery of quality service, aiming to always place expectations above perception of the customer service quality, win the confidence of the customer and increase sales/profit margin.

Despite these huge investments, most times TOs rip off far less in terms of profits and benefits while incurring important losses from the business venture leaving them the option of merely surviving. Therefore, the present picture of low service quality delivery in the TO industry within the context of Cameroon presented a very bleak future for the business and caused one to ask the question, what can be done to better the scenario? This served as motivation for more research to be conducted on this topic hence asking the question, “What level of understanding do ITOs (as tourism service providers) have concerning the service quality delivery to its customers?”

Within the framework of addressing a possible solution to the above stated problem, this study through the mixed methods approach suggested developing a holistic evaluation framework of service quality for ITOs in Cameroon. Given the importance of such a strategy in service marketing organisations and because it was a precursor to other constructs like repurchase, customer loyalty, customer satisfaction and profitability (Al-Msallam 2015:233;

Minh & Nguyen 2016:105). This framework will attempt to gauge by measuring service quality that will enable TO management, especially service marketers understand the customer service perception and expectation; close the gap between perceived and expected service as well as enable them step up the level of service quality offering that could reverse the contemporary trend. It was envisaged that the proposed model was believed would help not only ITOs but other service-oriented organisations, especially in the tourism industry to gain valuable advantage, as well as maintain competitive edge over their competitors only if knowledge of service quality and its assessment was fully understood by management.

Equally, existing literature on service quality evaluation in the ITO in Cameroon and within the larger context of SSA was limited. The current study provides new insight on the topic of service quality evaluation. The following sub-section was a presentation of the research questions that serves as guidelines all through this research.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research questions in a mixed method research have to do with a phenomenon that was unknown and are answered using narrative as well as numerical information (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003). The main research question this study aimed to answer was, “How can service quality be improved in the ITO industry in Cameroon?” The answer to this question lies in providing a better comprehensive understanding as to how quality service was evaluated in the ITO industry within the context of Cameroon. Hence, this study’s interest lies in suggesting and developing an assessment framework to achieve the objectives and answer the main research question. The main research question was based on the following secondary research questions constituted of quantitative and qualitative research questions respectively and presented as follows:

1.3.1 Quantitative research questions

I. Which determinant factors and dimensions were used to measure customer perception and expectation in the ITO industry?
II. To what extent does service quality expectation influence service quality in the ITO industry?

III. To what extent does service quality perception affect the service quality in the ITO industry?
IV. To what extent does service experience influence service quality in the ITO industry?
V. To what extent was it possible and feasible to elaborate and suggest a service quality assessment framework for the ITO industry?

1.3.2 Qualitative research questions

I. What are the perspectives of ITO industry expert opinions of a working definition of service quality?
II. What are the major determinants of service quality as perceived by experts in the case of Cameroon TO industry?
III. What are the dynamics between service quality expectation and service quality perception as viewed by the TO?

1.4 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1.4.1 Research aim

The study was aimed at modelling an effective and efficient service quality evaluation framework for the ITO within the context of the Cameroon TO industry.

1.4.2 Research objectives: Primary and secondary

The research objectives of this study was sub-divided into a primary objective while the secondary objectives included three quantitative and seven qualitative objectives. These are elaborated as follows:

1.4.2.1 Primary objective

The primary objective of this study was to develop a holistic framework for an effective and efficient assessment of ITO service quality in Cameroon.

1.4.2.2 Secondary objectives

The secondary objectives of this study are composed of the quantitative and qualitative secondary objectives listed as follows:

1.4.2.2.1 Quantitative secondary objectives

I. To evaluate the effects of customer service quality expectation on service quality in the ITO industry.
II. To examine the effects of customer service quality perception on service quality in the ITO industry.
III. To determine the influence of customer service experience on service quality in the ITO industry.
IV. To identify the quality-of-service determinant factors unique to the ITO industry.

1.4.2.2.2 Qualitative secondary objectives

I. To underscore the ITO industry experts' opinions of a working definition of service quality.
II. To empirically determine the major determinants of service quality in the ITO industry.
III. To identify the dynamics between service quality expectation and service quality perception as viewed by Cameroon TO industry experts.
IV. To understand the concept of service quality and its evaluation models by conducting a literature review.
V. To identify areas of quality management aimed at improving service quality in the ITO industry.

1.5 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES [H1: $\mu \neq 0$]

From the research objectives, questions and review of literature presented in chapter two, the following hypotheses are generated and proposed for this study and were tested. They included:

I. **H_1:** Empathy has a positive and significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.

II. **H_2:** Assurance has a positive and significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.

III. **H_3:** Responsiveness has a positive and significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.

IV. **H_4:** Reliability has a positive and significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.

V. **H_5:** Tangibility has a positive and significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

1.6.1 Research design

For this study, the sequential explanatory mixed method research design was utilised. Adopted the mixed method was relevant for this study. Moreover, using both the qualitative and quantitative methods to collect and examine the data provided reliable and confident information, offer a detailed understanding to the topic, provide a distinct picture as well as disclose interesting findings (Darfoon, 2013) to help develop an appropriate service quality evaluation framework.

The data sets would be collected sequentially (Harwell, 2011:154) that is, the quantitative data would be collected first, and its findings used to further explain the qualitative results. This design constitutes a sequential quantitative-qualitative analysis (Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2011:4) in which both the qualitative and quantitative analysis would have almost the same priority (i.e., equal status) (Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2011:5). Also, this design would help to balance and strengthen where method weaknesses may have existed and eliminate any form or type of prejudices (Greene, 2007: xiii) and provide a more comprehensive and convincing evidence.

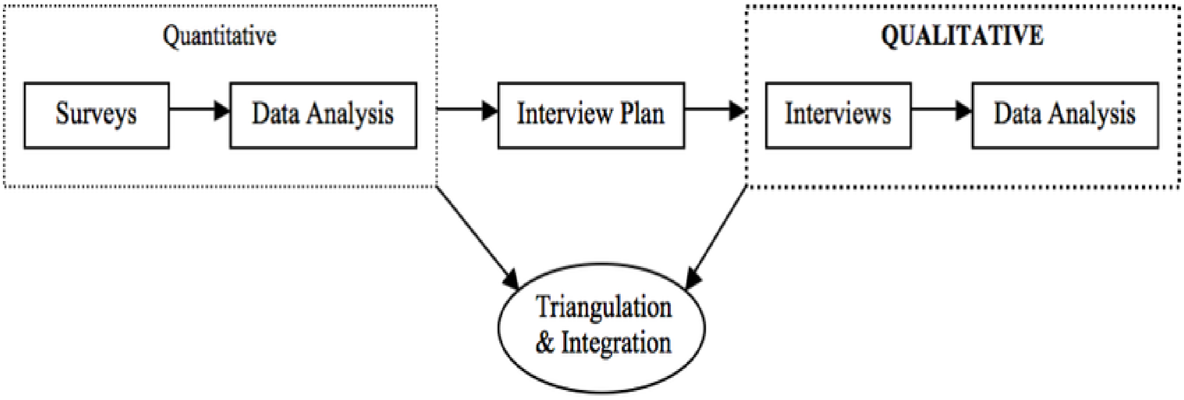


Figure 5: Sequential Mixed Method Design
Sources: Modified from Creswell (2003); Pansiri (2011:202)

1.6.2 Research methodology

Suggested and elaborated framework appropriate for service quality evaluation for the ITOs was the aim of this study and the mixed methodology would be applied to address the aim. The mixed method was used in most areas of management studies as it allowed and fostered innovation and creative thinking through its research design, data collection and analysis techniques (Uma and Pansiri, 2011:698). According to Uma et al. (2011:698), it was crucial that PhD candidates must conduct research using the mixed approach to improve their level of understanding in management studies. Besides, this method enables PhD candidates have a grasp of the diverse ways of obtaining, analysing as well as interpreting data in a manner that would enhance the understanding of the research problem.

1.6.2.1 Research philosophy

Based on research design chosen for this study, pragmatism philosophy will be adopted. The pragmatic paradigm makes use of both the positivist and interpretative philosophies. The pragmatism ideology was about empirically testing and fostering the idea on the ground via investigations that would generate a new concept through gathered data to create laws and/or principles (Greener, 2008:16). In comparison with the philosophies of positivism and interpretivism, pragmatism paradigm was very new though seen as a competitor research philosophy in research in business and academic research (Pansiri, 2005:196).

1.6.2.2 Research approach

Looking at the focus of this research from an organisational perspective or as a business problem and through investigation using various research methods aimed at developing a model (Greener, 2008:16), the deductive approach was applied on the ground given that it was closely associated with the positivist philosophy (Wong, Ong & Kuek, 2012:210).

1.6.2.3 Research data collection

This study focused on the collection of primary data quantitatively and qualitatively. The primary quantitative data would be obtained through an online survey questionnaire administered to ITO managers, employees, and customers while primary qualitative data would be collected via in-depth semi-structured interviews with seasoned tourism experts between the period 15 May to 15 October 2020. Chapter 6 provided details of the methodology applied in this study.

1.6.2.4 Sample population

The sample population involved in this study shall comprise of three groups of participants: group 1 [150 ITO managers and employees]; group II [150 ITO customers] working in any Cameroonian ITO licensed and operating either in Yaoundé or Douala, Cameroon. Group III comprised ten tourism professionals having more than five years working experience and operating either in Yaoundé or Douala. The supposed total population for this study was n=310. This targeted population of group I and II would be selected using the purposive sampling method. Lincoln and Guba cited in Wong and Chang (2011:11) argue that purposive sampling would be an appropriate technique in selecting the interviewees for such a study with similar characteristics like working in a particular job environment, whose insights are relevant to the topic. Also referred to as judgmental, selective, or subjective, the purposive sampling was a method that does not depend on probability means but rather depends on how the researcher tends to judge when it concerns the population selection in question (Etikan, Musa and Alkassim, 2016:1). Meanwhile, group III applied the expert sampling technique during the qualitative phase. This expert sampling technique was important in highlighting potential new areas of interest and opening doors for future research (Etikan et al., 2016: 2). The expert sampling technique was applied to select ten tourism professional's practitioners and academic researchers with more than five years of experience versed with the sample population being researched to share their views on the topic.

1.6.2.5 Method of data collection

Following the sequential explanatory mixed methodology, data collection commenced firstly with the quantitative data followed in second place by collection of the qualitative data. The quantitative research instrument used was a web-based survey questionnaire. This method was used first because it fits the current design and it helped the researcher obtain varied amount of information in an economic style (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007; Sapsford & Jupp, 2006). The survey would contain a covering note that explains the objective of the research also stressing the point of non-forceful participation and file confidentially. Going by the guidelines for conducting such a research, the questionnaire will be designed accordingly with the approval of my supervisors and the ethics review committee. The survey questionnaire will be made of three sections. The first section would focus on the respondent’s demography that is age, gender and experience. The second section would contain core questions asking respondents about their expectations and perceptions of service quality in/with an ITO company. These questions would be multiple-choice. Findings from the quantitative data collected and analysed would be used to prepare the questionnaire to be used in the qualitative method.

The qualitative research instrument was in-depth semi-structured interviews with ten tourism professionals versed within the sample population and having more than five years working experience conducted either face-to-face or online. The in-depth interviews were structured with a standardised questionnaire written in the English language for better comprehension.

1.6.2.6 Data analysis

The data were analysed through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software and a service quality score calculated for each of the dimensions to prove the proposed model. This software was a cross-platform application for analysing studies that use the mixed methods approach and it can carry out statistical analysis or offer integration with statistical packages (Fofang, 2014:15). The quantitative data analysis included descriptive statistics and inferential analysis techniques while descriptive statistics were used to analyse both the biographic information of the respondents and for data management. Conversely, inferential statistical analysis was used to test the research hypotheses using the Pearson moment correlation, multivariate regression model, Kendall correlation and measure for skewness and kurtosis. Data reliability was checked by calculating Cronbach Alpha to measure customer perception and performance in the ITO industry. As Said et al. (2013:69) purported, the higher the rate of the Cronbach Alpha, the more reliable the data. Qualitative analysis was completed using descriptive statistic of the biographic information and inferential analysis would be by conducting a Grounded Theory analysis. Once the quantitative and qualitative data are coded and analysis conducted, SPSS then supports with its integration. In this way, SPSS facilitates the exploration of the data providing the researcher with a comprehensive view.

1.6.2.7 Triangulation and data interpretation

As concerns triangulation, both the qualitative and quantitative data sets would be collected sequentially and integrated during the final phase of the analysis. Triangulation was important and relevant to this study as it would improve the chances to inferences through control. Also, for the purposes of complementarity, results from the data would be applied to explain the phenomenon of ITO quality service within the industry (through observations and surveys) (Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2011:4; Greene et al., 2007: xiii).

1.7 RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

This section explored the theoretical / academic contributions as well as the practical contribution to industry practitioners. Here are some of the points presented in section 9.4.1.

- *Academic contribution*

Studies in the field of service quality assessment though widely conducted around the world, however, for the TO they are still limited. More research focus was needed to exploit this field of study.

- *Practical contributions*

Tourism marketers should bear in mind the specific characteristics of each target audience when they think of selling experiences. This was as a result of the determinants of service quality that vary according to the differences in demographics such as age, educational level etc. This simply means that a general approach was not an ideal smart solution. It must be case specific to a particular sector within the industry.

The expectation and perception views of the staff (managers and employees) of the tourism organisation must be proportional to service quality understanding. This was possible via the strategic philosophy of the organisation. A standard procedure should be established during trainings which must be respected and followed by all staff to help build the organisation's service culture.

1.8 DELIMITATION OF STUDY

To have a clear vision, this study must be well defined in its scope. This study will be limited to ITOs operating in Cameroon, which is a powerful country within the ECCAS. Being a recognised member of the ECCAS is among the African Union eight pillars whose aim is to promote and strengthen a fruitful collaboration leading to the realisation of a self-sustained development of the economy, especially when it comes to the tourism industry.

Cameroon as the study site was chosen because the country faced and continues to face a significant problem of low service culture (World Bank, 2011a:11). Despite the huge touristic potentials in Cameroon which has earned it the slogan "All of Africa in One Country", the touristic resources at an infancy stage remain untapped and highly underdeveloped. A published report by the Commonwealth Secretariat on Cameroon tourism destination branding noted that service standards in general throughout Cameroon were considered not to be internationally competitive despite Cameroon's rich touristic potentials (Rick &Tom, 2008:10). It is believed that poor service quality was directly proportionate to low service culture which significantly affects the tourism industry and remains a huge challenge to its development.

Though Cameroon's tourism was growing progressively and is a promising destination for the future of African tourism, thanks to the Cameroon government's tourism policy and indications as a strong foreign exchange earner for the country (Euromonitor International, 2014). The current situation of low service culture would water down all efforts to keep the industry afloat and this trend needs to be urgently dealt with. In Cameroon, there was a general feeling of poor customer service and efforts to address this issue has turned futile.

Equally, because of the touristic culture and linguistic similarities of the people in these countries, the outcome of this study are significant and widely applied in this economic grouping. This research takes interest in evaluating service quality of ITO and would consider as target population, employees of ITO and customers using the services of ITO in Cameroon.

1.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Businesses in the service industry must attach importance to the issue of service quality to be able to survive within the competitive market structure (Saglik et al., 2014:100). In the tourism industry, the TO was among the main providers of service who take charge of delivering in a promised service tour package. The ITO serves customers from other countries coming to a destination by planning an all-inclusive package (hotel, catering, transport, leisure activities etc.) and offer customised experiences that may be inaccessible to independent tourists (USAID, 2017).

Tourism services are considered as compound especially those offered by TOs (especially inbound) because they comprise many separate components such as hotel, restauration, transport all joint in one package. To remain ahead of the competition, TOs must ensure the satisfaction of their customers through the provision of quality service and keeping good relations with their suppliers as well (Johann, 2014:99). In Cameroon and SSA, the evaluation of quality services to enhance tourist customers experience was required by mainstream suppliers like ITOs to improve on their competitive advantage. This assertion forms the reason for conducting this research. The holistic framework to be suggested would enable this research to evaluate service quality in the ITO. This model would equally seek to identify and state the difference between the customer expectation and perception in terms of performance using the different dimensions used in the SERVQUAL model.

The application of the sequential explanatory mixed method design enabled this study to offer a better and in-depth knowledge of quality service assessment in ITOs conducting operations in Cameroon particularly and the ECCAS region in general. The quantitative method included surveys in the form of questionnaires directed toward employees working in ITOs and customers of the participating ITOs using the software tool survey monkey. The researcher would also use the observation method at some point to obtain on the ground information.

The qualitative method included interviews with tourism professionals. The reliability of the data would be checked by calculating Cronbach Alpha then analysed using the SPSS software, ideal for this research design. The SPSS software can conduct statistical analysis and integration with statistical packages such that the data are presented in a clear manner to attain the objectives of this study.

It is believed the research findings of this study would deliver significant understanding to the research domain and add to service quality assessment literature in the Cameroon TO industry and SSA. Equally, it is hoped that these findings would have far reaching practical implications to managers of ITOs (as well as stakeholders in the TO industry) and practitioners in the service industry improve their knowledge on the significance of quality service assessment, necessary not only to drive sales and profitability but also lead to customer satisfaction, loyalty and even repurchase. The next sub-section presents the thesis organisation in terms of chapters.

1.10 ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

The entire research was organised into four parts consisting of nine chapters. Chapter 1 was a background of the study. It was a preface of the thesis and included the problem statement, aim and objectives. Also, included was the section on research design and methodology.

I. Part 1: Literature review: This relates to chapter 2 which will broadly examine previous studies on the topic of quality service and its evaluation, its history and evolution, the process, limitations etc. and other related generalities. Chapter 3 will focus on previous studies conducted specifically on the SERVQUAL model, its development over time and its structuring. Chapter 4 will discuss the SERVQUAL model within the TO industry.

II. Part 2: Relates to the suggestion of a framework for evaluation of service quality for TOs. This shall comprise Chapter 5 which will suggest a framework specific to the ITO industry.

III. Part 3: Testing and validation of the proposed framework. This section consists of Chapter 6 which will detail out the research methodological approach; Chapter 7 will be a discussion on the quantitative data analysis and presentation of findings while Chapter 8 will present the qualitative data analysis and discuss the main findings.

IV. Part 4: Discussions, conclusions, recommendations, limitations, and future research. This part has only one chapter (Chapter 9) which will mainly focus on the interpretation and discussions that ensue from the findings presented in Chapter 8. The chapter would equally provide a comparison and summary of previous studies present in extant literature in relation to the topic under investigation and draw up meaningful conclusions with important implications to TOs industry practitioners and scholars. Further in this Chapter 9, some recommendations would be made from the conclusions drawn earlier and the limitations encountered in this present study captured. These areas of concern based on the contributions outlined would serve as an indication for possible future research.

PART 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

CHAPTER TWO

OVERVIEW AND EVALUATION OF SERVICE QUALITY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviewed past studies conducted within the service quality domain and its assessments models. This chapter would address in the different sections the following secondary objectives:

I. To understand the concept of service quality and its evaluation models by conducting a literature review. (Section 2.4; 2.9 and 2.12)
II. To underscore the ITO industry experts' opinions of a working definition of service quality. (Section 2.2)
III. To identify the service quality determinant factors unique to the ITO industry. (Section 2.8)

IV. To identify areas of quality management aimed at improving service quality in the ITO industry. (Section 2.13)

The information would serve as a base to advance a relevant conceptual model for this study's ITO service industry that would be presented and discussed in Chapter 5.

This chapter discussions commenced with understanding what other researchers have defined service quality to be terminology, the history and evolution of service quality, the various existing theories and constructs concerning service quality evaluation and examining other related themes and sub-themes to the topic under research, shall be collected from various articles and textbooks from various databases. This chapter will be organised according to various themes and issues identified as well as developed from previous literature related to the topic under investigation highlighting the arguments, criticisms, theoretical background, and methodologies. It will begin with the breaking down of service quality terminology as well as the basic components to achieve the following secondary objective.

Assessment of quality service occupies an important position in past marketing research studies and business management studies. Key search terms like "service quality", "evaluation", "service", "SERVQUAL" among others were used through the UNISA Library access gateway to access databases like SAGE, Science Direct, Research Gate, Emerald, etc. to obtain rich information gathered from journal articles such as *Journal of Retailing, International Journal of Quality and Service Sciences, Journal of Marketing, Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research, Journal of Service Science* and *Journal of Marketing Management.* This research sought to produce valuable insight as well as provide improved knowledge viewed from different stakeholder perspective and that will add up to a better understanding to this widely studied area of service quality assessment, thereby, achieving the following secondary objective:

I. To evaluate the effects of customer service quality expectation on service quality in the ITO industry. (Section 2.7; 2.9 and 2.10)
II. To examine the effects of customer service quality perception on service quality in the ITO industry. (Section 2.7; 2.9 and 2.10)

In the following paragraphs, literature paying keen interest on the conceptualisation and service quality evaluation concepts will be reviewed. Also, the review of literature would be shortened relative to the main question asked in this study. Finally, the SERVQUAL model would be equally presented and discussed.

2.2 UNDERSTANDING SERVICE, QUALITY AND PERCEIVED SERVICE QUALITY

2.2.1 Defining Service

The American Marketing Association defined services as “activities, benefits or satisfaction that are offered for sale or provided in connection with the sale of goods” (cited by Kapoor et al., 2011:10). In another definition by McColl-Kennedy (2003:3), services are defined simply as “acts, performances and experiences”. Referring to this study, services offered to the customer would focus on the actions and performances by the service provider, as well as the customer experience after the service was delivered. Service and service quality studies conducted, dates as far back as the 18th century during which several definitions of the word “service” are presented to identify its meaning and context. Services comprise the activities whose productivity is not a physical which are consumed and offer additional value in different arrangements (Quinn et al. 1987). According to Eiglier and Langeard (1999), a service is an object of exchange with a market value (Kotler & Keller, 2008:402). According to Paulišić et al., (2016:234), “service” has its origin from “servitium” a Latin word meaning being a slave. Simply put, it was a non-object that one cannot see, feel, taste or touch in prelude to some kind of exchange (Felix, 2017:2), meaning service must move together with its service provider as it requires an exchange between the one providing and the one consuming.

One of the universally most accepted service definitions was that developed by Grönroos (1990:27). He defines service as an interaction between the customer and the service provider with the aim to provide a solution to customer problems. The common ground of most definitions of service lies in its intangible character, its economic relevance, and its exchange process from the one providing the service to the one consuming the service provided that forms the basis of its market value. Such market values are achievable under two circumstances: firstly, material resources and service providers or employees and secondly, the customers of services (Paulišić et al., 2016:234).

2.2.2 Defining Quality

Since the 1920s, there are various quality definitions that emerged from total quality management (TQM) concept. When Walter Shewhart introduced this new paradigm, one of his students Joseph Juran defined quality in 1989 as being the *fitness of use, need satisfying product* elements that were without errors. Juran included the point of human environment in TQM, an idea which was bought by the Japanese who as from the 1950s were the leaders of the quality movement. According to Deming (1986), quality means living up to the *customer needs* through always seeking to constantly improve and reduce the variation rates. They are commonly known to be the leaders of the quality movement. In defining quality, Brody and Coulling (1996) stress that quality concerns understanding and living up to the customer's needs and wants of all the time. Another well-known quality definition is the *difference between the expected versus the perceived performance* determined by several indicators as defined by Parasuraman et al. (1985). The topic on quality was wide and varied just like studies in several different domains. According to the International Standards Organization (ISO) 2017, quality was defined as "the degree to which a set of inherent characteristics of an object fulfil requirements". The American Society of Quality (ASQ) equally provided a definition of quality as "the totality of features and characteristics of a product or a service that bear its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs". In summary, quality was the ability of a thing (either product or service) to satisfy the customer's need. For this study, reference would be on service.

At first TQM focused more on the reliability and inspection of products. Later, after the Japanese took over leadership of the movement, changes occured as the focus became more customer-centric (Green, 2006). Several authors have approached as well as measured quality differently. Two of such authors though with a ten years' time difference, have commonalities in their understanding of quality. Ghobadian, Speller, and Jones (1994) understood quality by identifying five main groups namely: customer-led; value-led; supply-led; product-led and transcendent. These groups were defined as follows:

I. Transcendent: This was associated with perceived quality and personal salience. It is hard to apply because of the difficulty to define clearly the determinants of quality.
II. Product-led: It was the unit of goodness and depends on the quantity of measure of the service units of goodness.
III. Supply-led: This was how the process is conforming to the requirements. It focuses on the supply side and management from within.
IV. Customer-led: This was how the requirements of the customer are fulfilled. This was applied in organisations having high customer contact levels.
V. Value-led: This was about the cost of production and the price the customer pays for a service.

A decade on, Schneider and White (2004) provided a definition of quality based on three main approaches namely: philosophical, customer-based, and technical approach.

I. Philosophical approach: Here, quality was defined by what one sees and was equated to as inborn excellence.
II. Customer-based approach: Here, the customer defines service quality depending on his/her perception of what quality service is.
III. Technical approach: Looking from an objective point of view, quality could be assessed considering the difference from the standard deviation.

The definition of Schneider and White (2004) was more conceptual in approach with a customer-centric focus. Brophy and Couling (1996) following a quality concepts analysis, settled that in defining quality emphasis was laid on the connection between the service provided, the objective why the service was being offered and the customer. They made a salient idea that quality was attained by setting clear definition of what the product must achieve and if the service meets the need of the customers (Brophy & Couling, 1996:7). This simply implied that, firstly quality does not reflect the highest rating and lastly, quality for a customer was different from quality for another (Poll & Boekhorst, 2007).

2.2.3 Perceiving Service Quality

Perceived service quality as seen by cognitive psychology dictionary as the process of how information gotten from the environment was converted into sound memories, events and objects (Roth, 1986). In the field of service literature, perceptions of a service or product are a customer's ideas, beliefs, views or/and thoughts of judgment. Service quality going by Berry et al. (1989) was more subjective therefore because of this, perceived quality was expressed by the customer's decision of a product or service as totally superior/excellent (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Perceived quality was analysed at different angles and could be differentiated from actual quality. It could be seen as a superior concept rather than single and general in evaluation.

In the last 30 years, among the many topics researched in service marketing was the idea of service quality. Therefore, understanding service quality from various researcher viewpoints was very crucial as one could understand that good service quality depends upon the consistent manner through which services delivered surpasses the customers' expectations. According to Lewis and Boom (1983), the nature of the service quality should be determined by the service delivered compared to what the customer expected. Among many other scholars, Parasuraman et al. (1985:48), researchers in the field of service quality, presented their definition as "the degree and direction of discrepancy between customer service perceptions and expectations or as the discrepancy between a customers' perceived service and customers' expectation concerning the offering of such services" (Sayareh, Iranshahi & Golfakhrabadi, 2016:204).

According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Malhotra (2005), the service quality concerned the size as well as the course difference in the expectations and perceptions of service by the customer. Service quality as was described was made of service characteristics capable to fulfil stated as well as indirect needs (Kotler & Armstrong, 2011; Wu & Ko, 2013; Tabaku & Cerri, 2016). Other studies have equally attempted a definition of service quality. For instance, Asubonteng, Mccleary and Swan (1996) assert that service quality was the existing space between the customers' expectation service performance level before a service encounter and what is perceived as service received. Equally, Gefan (2002) avers that the service quality was when customers equate the service quality they want to receive and what they finally get at the end.

As expressed by Kasper and Gabbott (2006:186), the notion of quality service was quite a compounded phenomenon consisting of service attribute intended to satisfy the market needs. Over the years, researchers have defined what they understood by service quality. Parasuraman et al. (1988:15) define it as a behavioural pattern that was different from satisfaction, in which there are perceptions and expectations match of the customer's performance. Service quality involves all the characteristics and properties capable to satisfy the customer's requirements (Kotler & Keller, 2009:169). Service quality depended on what each customer perceived and not the standard service was perceived to have. Another prominent author Zeithaml (1988:3) defines service quality as evaluation of a customer's standing compared to others and maintains that services are complex to assess as they require many admittance attributes and mostly revolves around the customer. Most service quality definitions depend on customer-led approaches where service quality was seen as the needs of a customer being satisfied, showing an organisation's commitment to identifying the customers' needs and meeting up or overriding these needs. One of the most outstanding service quality definitions accepted worldwide was the value-based definition by Wycof (1984:81) in which the quality service was stated as the level of intended and control factors that could be used to meet the expectation of the customers.

Parasuraman et al (1985) suggested that to be part of the customer expectation's pre-purchase, perceived quality process as well as output service quality must be considered. In this regard, perceived quality could be defined as the resultant effect from comparing the expectations of a customer before the service was being offered and a customer's service experiences (Liljander & Strandviz, 1993:6). Service quality was seen as a vital necessity and determining factor of competitiveness to establish and maintain customer relationships full of satisfaction (Felix, 2017:3). Therefore, in organisations, service quality means identifying the needs and specificities; the moment it was identified, the "service quality" objectives of each department in an establishment must be to adhere, respect and fully implement these specificities.

Theories related to service quality were developed since the 1990s with numerous studies focusing on the report concerning service quality and satisfaction (Basiony et al., 2014). Markovic and Jankovic (2013) conducted such a study within the hotel industry in Croatia to ascertain the existing bond between service quality perception and customer satisfaction. Their research findings indicated that quality service in hotels was of significance in predicting customer satisfaction. Just like research had shown, service quality was a vital pointer towards customer satisfaction. However, Wang and Wang (2006) argued that service quality was an attitude type that was related but cannot be equated to satisfaction owing to the difference between performance perception and expectation.

Several approaches to service quality indicated how important and relevant it was to service literature. From a superior viewpoint, service quality could mean “innate excellence” (Kursunluoglu, 2014). Judging from the approach based on a product, quality could be seen as “a precise and measurable variable” where the more cost entails a better or superior quality. Judging from the side of the customer, the quality was proportional to the satisfaction level. This meant that the more quality, the better the fulfilment derived by the customer. In a manufacturing set up, quality could be defined as “making it right the first time”. In determining the value, quality could be said to be determined by cost and price.

2.3 HISTORY AND EVOLUTION OF SERVICE QUALITY

Gronroos (1984) developed and first introduced a construct for the evaluation of the service quality in which there were three service quality elements identified: the functional and technical qualities as well as the image of the corporate. From the value-based definition of service quality by Wyclof (1984), Parasuraman et al. (1985) established that the GAP model (Figure 6) was revealed by five gaps which focused on the dimensions of quality service that became the universally accepted framework for assessing service quality.

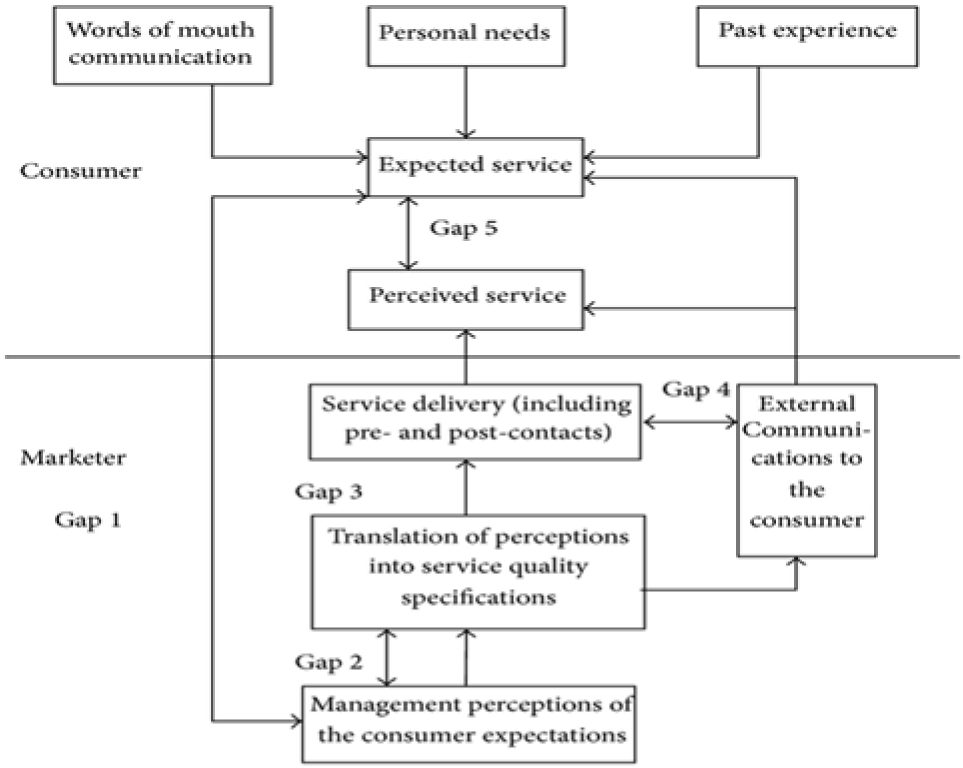


Figure 6: Conceptual Gap Model of Service Quality
Source: Parasuraman et al. (1988)

According to Grapentine (1998:4), each of the gaps are defined as follows:

I. 1st Gap: The contrast between the customer's expectation of service and the perception of the customer's expectation on the side of management.
II. 2nd Gap: The contrast between the customer's expectation on the side of management and the service quality precise requirements.
III. 3rd Gap: The contrast between the service quality precise requirements and the provided service.
IV. 4th Gap: The contrast between the service delivered and what the customer was conveyed as service.
V. 5th Gap: The contrast between the service expectations and service perceptions of the customer.

The GAP model remained relevant as it was built on the theory of expectation-confirmation developed by Oliver (1980). Service quality, according to Oliver (1980), was defined as that existing space between the expectation and perception of a service delivered to the customer. It therefore means that the higher the perceptions compared to the experiences, then the better the service quality and vice versa. The fact that a gap could occur owing to a service organisation's internal lapses within the service delivery system and/or marketing functions was further elaborated by Parasuraman et al. (1990).

Grapentine (1988) and Parasuraman et al. (1990), in their research conducted between 1985 - 1988, took keen interest in Gap 5 (expected vs. perceived service gap). In their 1988 publication in the *Journal of Retailing (JR)* article, the equation $Q = P - E$ was developed as well as empirically put into use. The expectations E and performance P are defined as follows:

I. *"SERVQUAL Expectation Measure (E);* The measurement was based Likert scale style of 7 levels.

II. *"SERVQUAL performance measure (P):* The measurement was based likert scale style of 7 levels (Grapentine 1988:5).

The Gap model was tested in other service organisations and contexts within businesses such as banking, maintenance, and telephony. The results were statistically relevant showing validity of a varied perceptual dimension multi-item measure of the service quality whose coefficient alphas exceeded 0.70 of the multi-item measures of the service quality (Grapentine, 1988:5). From literature explored, it showed that less studies in the TO industry were conducted, hence, the relevance of this study.

This section sought to achieve the following secondary objectives:

I. To evaluate the effects of customer service quality expectation on service quality in the ITO industry.

II. To examine the effects of customer service quality perception on service quality in the ITO industry.

After the first studies in the eighties, many scholars applied the Gap model which recorded huge successes. However, the Gap model was not void of criticisms. According to Mauri, Minazzi and Muccio (2013:134), some scholars thought that comparing between perception and expectations relative to some pointsets delimits the model under test. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry moving forward in their research from 1988-1990 modified and presented an extended quality service model (Figure 7). Grapentine (1988:6) notes that Parasuraman et al. (1988) had realised that some internal organisational factors somehow affected the quality of customer service delivery level. These factors (gaps 1-4) were somehow related to what they had already identified in their first framework.

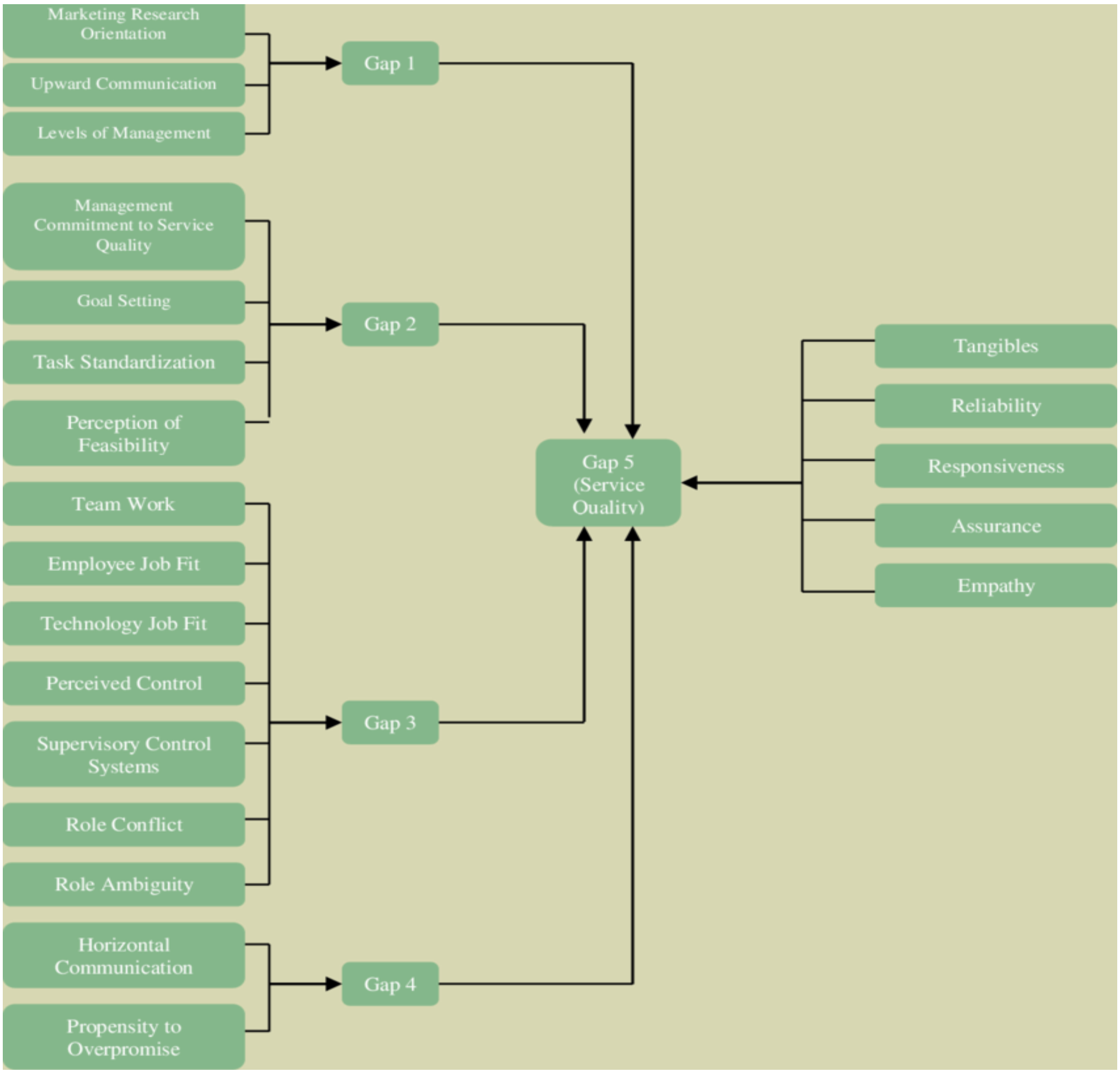


Figure 7: Service Quality Extension model
Source: Zeithaml et al. (1988) cited in Nitin and Deshmukh (2004:918)

According to Grapentine (1988:8), the article entitled, “The behavioural consequences of service quality” put in literary formed by Parasuraman et al. (1996) dwelled on a literature review of the existing ties between service quality and level of profit and examined various service quality and customer behavioural intentions relationships. The Profit Impact of Market Strategy (PIMS) was an all-inclusive continuous inter-industry study that started in the mid-60s by General Electric to analyse business strategies to boost performance competitiveness and profitability. It was applied with relevant interaction between service quality, marketing variables and profitability. The findings showed organisations with a superior service quality achieving higher growth levels in the market. Looking at service quality as well as profits, businesses in the top five experienced about 8% increase in prices with an added market share than other contestants. Hence, Parasuraman et al. (1996) established a behavioural and finance-related theory for the outcome of the service quality.

Studies authored by Parasuraman et al. (1985) and Grönroos (1984) contributed enormously and distinctly in the studies and literature of service quality. In their research work, they have both highlighted the need for the quality-of-service concept to be given a clearer understanding to significantly increase the scholarly and practical base within the body of knowledge in the field of service quality. Sayareh et al. (2016:204) and Grönroos (1984) argue that service quality depended on the attributes of service expectation and perception. He strongly believed that the past experiences influence the expected service meanwhile the perceived service was assessed by the customer of the delivered service. With the understanding that differences exist between product and service, Parasuraman et al. (1985) argue that owing to the intangible nature of service, service providers are challenged to better understand customer's perceptions so that they can best evaluate the service quality.

2.4 CONCEPT OF SERVICE

When developing a service design, the concept of service has a key role to play. Based on existing literature, Sasser et al. (1978) were the first to use the service concept to explain the set of elements to be sold to a customer (Paulišić et al., 2016:235). The service concept was conceptualised to mean the way a service provider would want its customers, shareholders, and employees to perceive the services it offers (Heskett, 1986). The notion of service concept was used to develop new services (Goldstein, Johnston, Duffy & Rao, 2002:124) According to Goldstein et al. (2012:124), the service concept is the "what" and the "how" a service was perceived by the customer and the offered by the service provider through the strategic vision of the company. This was shown in Figure 8.

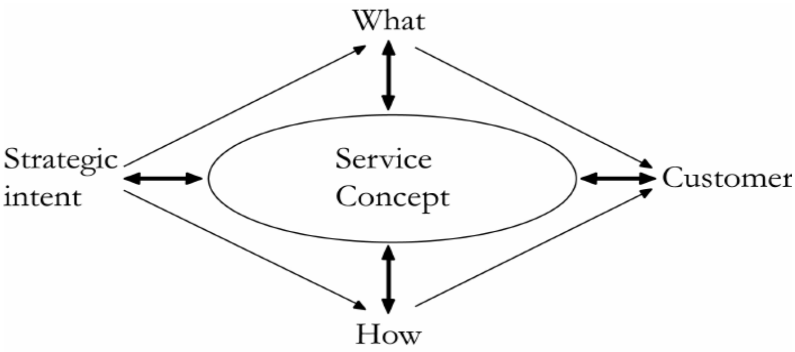


Figure 8: The service concept
Source: Goldstein et al. (2002:124)

According to Johnston et al. (2012), service concept attempts to generate in its definition the type of services provided and/or received that are straightforward, accepted, and shared, ensuring the motive of the service was delivered. By this, service concept was viewed commonly, and operations could understand better what must be delivered, how to deliver it and the marketers would know and understand what they are selling. By extension, the need to understanding customers' needs helped in developing the organisation's strategic positioning and competitive directions. This method was first introduced by Lovelock (2001) who asserts that the service marketing concept was very vital to the customer as it indicated what kind of service to be delivered and how the service would be delivered to meet customers' requirements.

Different authors had established alternate service quality concepts; for instance, the American and the European perspective (Parasuraman, et al., 1985; 1988 and Lehtinen 1982). By the American perspective, evaluation of quality service was dependent on the functional quality dimension, explained through the empathy, tangibility, responsibility, reliability, and assurance dimensions (Kang & James, 2004:268). Meanwhile, in the European perspective, service quality must have all three components consisting of the technical and functional qualities as well as the image of the corporate.

Following recent developments in the service concept, some scholars had pointed out that there was ambiguity and vagueness associated with the terms used in the service concept. According to Grapentine (1998:13), Parasuraman et al. (1988) highlighted that an acceptable service was "the minimum level of service, customers are willing to accept". Teas (1993) in his definition of service quality stated that the difference between service desired and perceived, also known as perceived service quality (PSQ) Gap 5, related to the perceived service superiority gap (Zeithaml et al., 1996). According to Teas' suggestions, if the perceived service measure denoted as P exceeded the desired service measure denoted as D. Therefore, it was considered that a company was providing a superior service denoted as SS. (Teas, 1993; 1994:132). According to Parasuraman et al., the following logic of relationship were considered:

I. P [l] = 7 and D [l] = 6, implies SS [I] = +1
II. P [2] = 6 and D [2] = 5, implies, SS [2] = +1

Consequently, SS [l] = SS [2], even though performance P [l] was higher than performance P [2]. Teas found this illustration reasonably unreliable.

The strategies for better service quality are central when it came to the service quality concept in modern marketing such as issues that had to do with improving quality and adhering to recognised quality standards. The modern service concept had as outcome more profit to every business including the TO industry. Also, quality control influences the behaviour and attitude of the customer to a high level. Following a service quality assessment and a framework developed, better quality standards were implemented and respected which was essential for quality improvement.

2.5 CULTURE OF SERVICE

Some two decades ago, Grönroos (1990) researched the notion of service culture. Looking from a wider perspective of organisational culture, service culture was defined as the value to appreciate good service (Grönroos, 2007). In such circumstances, the provision of good service was considered valuable if it had positive effect on the customers. Judging from this definition, service culture was not only principally about practices within an organisation but also about the manner, values and behaviours of its employees.

In the tourism industry, the employees of any organisation are the first to have contact with the customers and they leave a perception part in the mind of these customers in building a service image of the organisation. According to Grönroos (2007), when an organisation was considered to possess a strong service culture, the positive attitudes of the employees will be boosted towards providing good services to the customer. This obviously had positive implications to the employees. According to Zeithaml, et al. (2009), there are three key implications. Firstly, service culture thrives where good services were appreciated. Secondly, good service was provided to both the external customer and the employees (internal customer). Thirdly, good service was seen as a lifestyle and given naturally. Gebauer, Edvardsson and Bjurko (2010) assert that service culture was a precondition for an organisation's excellence and business efficiency. Research studies on service culture till date had focused on conceptualising the relationship between business performance and service quality. However, there was little empirical research that fully explores and tested the relationship between service culture and perceived service quality (Hoang, Hill & Lu, 2010:5).

Some theories provided an explanation of the relationship between service quality and service culture and why a good service culture may had led to better service quality. The social exchange theory developed by Sierra and McQuitty (2005) explained how service culture may influence the assessment of customer-based service quality. They maintain that a supportive service culture boosts the employees of an organisation to work harder to satisfy the customer's needs which obviously affected the perceived service quality. According to the service-profit chain theory (Wieseke & Hoyer, 2009), organisational performance was as a result of customer satisfaction owing to the employees' attitude and performance of service quality.

Several studies had revealed that employee service behaviours were a direct consequence of service culture (Nelson, 2007; Zerbe, Dobni & Harel, 1998). Being good intermediaries between the customer and the organisation, the employee's behaviour towards his/her job in terms of commitment and satisfaction were primordial in providing good services (Payne & Webber, 2006). For better understanding, definitions of the key terms (affective commitment and employee job satisfaction) were provided. Employee affective commitment was defined as the level to which employees were emotionally attached and engaged within an organisation (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch & Topolnytsky, 2002) while employee job satisfaction was defined as an employee's pleasurable emotional response towards the employer and their employment (Yee, Yeung & Cheng, 2009). It was argued that the behaviour of employees such as job satisfaction and affective commitment therefore mediated the relationship between service culture and service quality.

2.6 SERVICE ENCOUNTER

Human interaction was at the centre of the service encounter. It was the take-off point to the understanding of the importance of human contact. This relationship happened between the service provider and the customer and was seen as a human-to-human interaction. Suprenant and Solomon (1987) suggested a definition of service encounter in which they said it was a dyadic exchange between the customer and the one who provided a service. In the service encounter, the customer's role was viewed as prime and very important because of their uniqueness and individuality characteristics. In as much as humans differ from one another, so are customer perception experiences different from the other. According to Czepiel, Solomon and Suprenant (1985), owing to personal interaction, it was difficult to separate the production and consumption of services. Bateson in Czepiel et al. (1985:76) presented the service encounter in the form of a triad. This triad included the personal contact, the customer and the service organisation providing the service. The relationship between these three was illustrated in Figure 9.

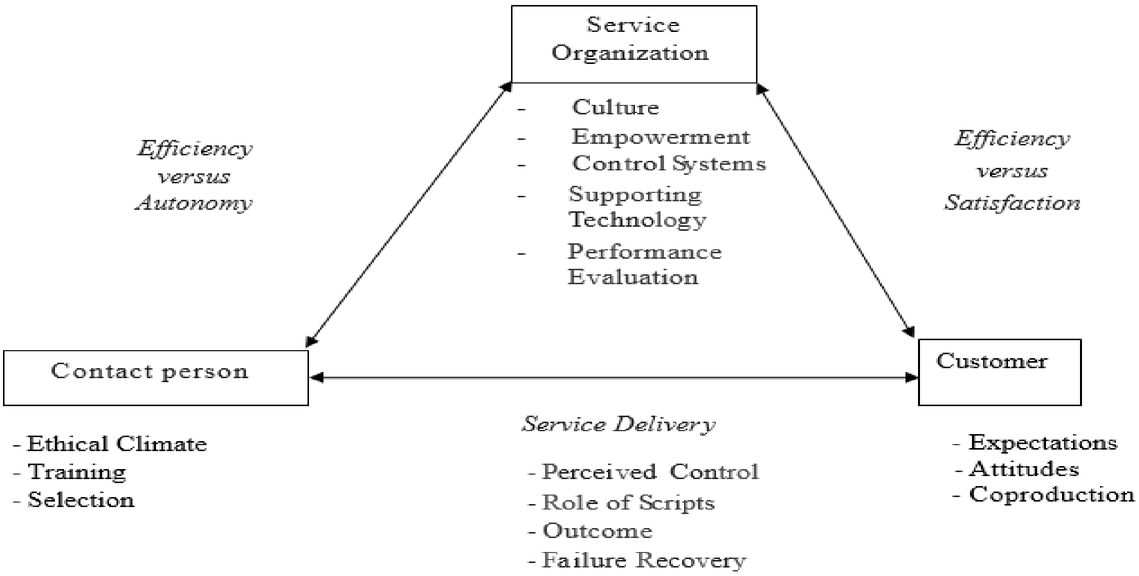


Figure 9: The service encounter Triad
Source: Lin, Po and Orellan (2010:2)

In a related study, Czepiel (1990) outlined the complications involved in such an interaction between the customer and service provider. He proposed that recurrent exchanges led to the development of personal and professional dimensions. Within the service process, inputs of such exchanges involved the customer's time, work and social relationship.

Bitner, Booms and Tetreault (1990) analysed the approving and disapproving incidents in a service encounter by applying the critical incident method. They qualitatively studied the importance of the customer service-employee relationship to customer quality evaluation. They proposed that in service business (such as TOs) which involved high level of contact between the service provider represented by the employee and the customer, reviewing critical incidents was a gateway for service operations managers to improve customer satisfaction in a service encounter. The classification for the improvement of any service encounter responsive to any service process and employee failure focused on three issues response of employee to customer needs; response of employee to service delivery failures and employee actions that were not solicited and unprompted.

Kim and Lee (2012) analysed the effect of passive customers on the service encounter in a restaurant setting. They realised that customers' multidimensional variables and factors shaped the service exchange for the active customer and the service employee. Furthermore, they noted the inference to manage the passive customers in a strategic manner so that the service provider could obtain a successful service encounter.

During a service encounter, it was nearly impossible to sway the customer's attitude in a particular direction. Solomon et al. (1985) found that each service encounter was unique and individual role performers played a key role in the outcome. Therefore, the service provider must control the service encounter critically to obtain the desired outcome. Solomon et al. (1985) further maintained that service encounters are role performances which should be consistent between the customer and the service employee. In effect, the service process was complicated with the involvement of various actors within changing contexts. Hence, it was difficult to design and manage a service process when there were fixed roles and results to achieve by both the customer and the service employee.

Ma and Dube (2011) in an article entitled, "Process and outcome of interdependency in frontline service encounters" presented the service encounter concept as an interdependency of behaviour. They recognised two different types of dyadic interdependency (process and outcome interdependency). They examined both forms of dyadic interdependency by applying the interpersonal circumplex model and the related theory of complementarity to observe the interpersonal behaviour between service provider and customer in a frontline service setting. Their findings suggested that process interdependency of dyadic behaviour inhibited one another greatly in a complementary way meanwhile the outcome interdependency indicated complementarity exchanges that boosted customer satisfaction generally whereas anti-complementary exchanges reduced the customer satisfaction. They proposed a replacement of the dyadic interdependency interaction as a unitary paradigm to a two-interdependency construct between the service process and the outcome. Between the service provider and customer, the identification of the process and outcome interdependency led to the development of behavioural predictability in a service encounter. The service outcome effect was based on the different behaviours of the parties involved. This either marred or made customer satisfaction depending on how they complemented each other.

According to Akaka and Vargo (2015) in a study, considered doing an extension of the service encounter to a service-ecosystem with the aim of providing a broad theoretical opinion as well as advancing the service marketing literature. This view saw the customer’s skills and competences to develop a more specific service encounter that covered the whole system. According to Sørensen et al. (2013), the innovation perspective pointed out that front line employees who were in direct contact with the customers must be innovative during the service to encounter success in the development of ideas and processes. Gazzoli et al. (2013) supported the previous statement when it was realised that when employees are guided by the customer (customer needs are understood), they positively affected the customer experience during the service encounter which added attribute to the service eco-system design.

2.7 SERVICE QUALITY CHARACTERISATION

It was easy to determine and measure quality of goods through qualitative standards but when it comes to services, measuring the service quality was a paradigm involving many phases in its process (Lam, 2012). Basically, services have specific characteristics (Gummerson, 2004) which are the “product” offered by tourism businesses (Evans, 2015). Service characterisation was usually explained by the four traditional basic elements, namely: perishability, heterogeneity, intangibility, and inseparability (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Kotler & Keller, 2009; Ganesh & Haslinda, 2014:1190) and ownership (Evans, 2015:685) which make services different from physical products.

I. *Intangibility*

Services are referred to as intangible because they cannot be felt, heard, tasted, seen, or smelled before being bought (Ganesh & Haslinda, 2014:1190). They are performance rather than objects (Hoffman et al. 2002). This implies that services are like a process, a performance and are experienced rather than consumed. A tourism product cannot be tested before having the experience. Tourists purchase an experience because of price, brand loyalty, location, and recommendations (Swart, 2018:194). For example, a TO must have a running marketing budget which included strategies like advertisements and digital marketing.

II. *Heterogeneity*

This relates to service performances which are highly variable based on individuals' experience (Ganesh & Haslinda, 2014:1190). Tourism products are different. TO employees must be motivated enough to deliver consistent quality services within the business guidelines. Through the maintenance of high standards throughout the service delivery process, the employee must be aware of the customer needs. Practically, it was much more difficult to apply the concept because of the complex human behaviours during particular circumstances (Swart, 2018:195).

III. *Inseparability*

This refers to those services produced and consumed simultaneously (Ganesh & Haslinda, 2014:1190). Unlike services, physical products are first produced, sold, and then consumed. The delivery of a tourism experience happens during the "moment of truth" during the service encounter. According to Evans (2015:686), the moment of truth was the "the time and place where the customer interacts with the organisation". To cater for the specific needs of customers, the management of TO companies must allocate to particular employees' particular responsibilities and provide them with training for appropriate skills development.

IV. *Perishability*

This relates to the view that services cannot be stored or saved for future consumption (Ganesh & Haslinda, 2014:1190). It could mean that services will not exist if they are not consumed at their appointed time. According to Ganesh and Haslinda (2014:1190), it also reflects that service marketers have less control for handling supply and demand fluctuation. TO entrepreneurs should know their market and customers' needs to be able to obtain the right quantities of the tourism product to satisfy existing capacities.

V. ***Ownership***

Tourist customers have no level of ownership of service. Hence, TO entrepreneurs only struggle to gain the loyalty of customers, give them maximum satisfaction and hope that they will revisit with the aim to repurchase. Loyalty programmes are common in airlines, hotels and even restaurants but they will hardly be present in a TO company. Through public relations and promotional activities, customers get a closer feel of the belonging and value for money of the service experience (Evans, 2015:686).

It was noted that the "experience economy" was gradually replacing the service economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1999:2) despite the growth in the service industry which was faring well since four decades ago owing to recent developments in ICTs, more leisure time, more free income to spend and improved knowledge by customers on travels (Barron & Harris 2003:22-23). According to Pine and Gilmore (1999:2), experience involves an individual who commits personally to create long lasting experiences. Services especially in tourism were classified as a tertiary industry (Woodruffe, 1995) which was being supported by the primary and secondary industries. According to Woodruffe (1995:26), services were further categorised as B2B services, customer services and industrial services. He further explained that it was usually challenging to individual service industry activities despite figures from government statistics and economic indicators as reflected by an overview of the service economy. Therefore, most literature on services concentrated on individual service sectors.

2.8 FACTORS DETERMINING SERVICE QUALITY AND ITS DIMENSIONS

This section of this chapter seeks to address the following secondary objectives:

I. To explore the major determinants of service quality as perceived by experts in the ITO industry.
II. To identify the service quality determinant factors unique to the ITO industry.

Service quality involves a set of factors packaged and delivered as one. For instance, Berry et al. (1985); Johnston and Lyth (1991) among other researchers concur that customer expectations hardly involve one part of the service package but rather many parts.

Parasuraman et al. (1985:48) developed a list of determinants of service quality from their focus group studies involving customers and service providers. These included competence, communication, access, reliability, credibility, courtesy, understanding, responsiveness, tangibles, and security (Johnston, 1995:54). This was illustrated next as Figure 10.

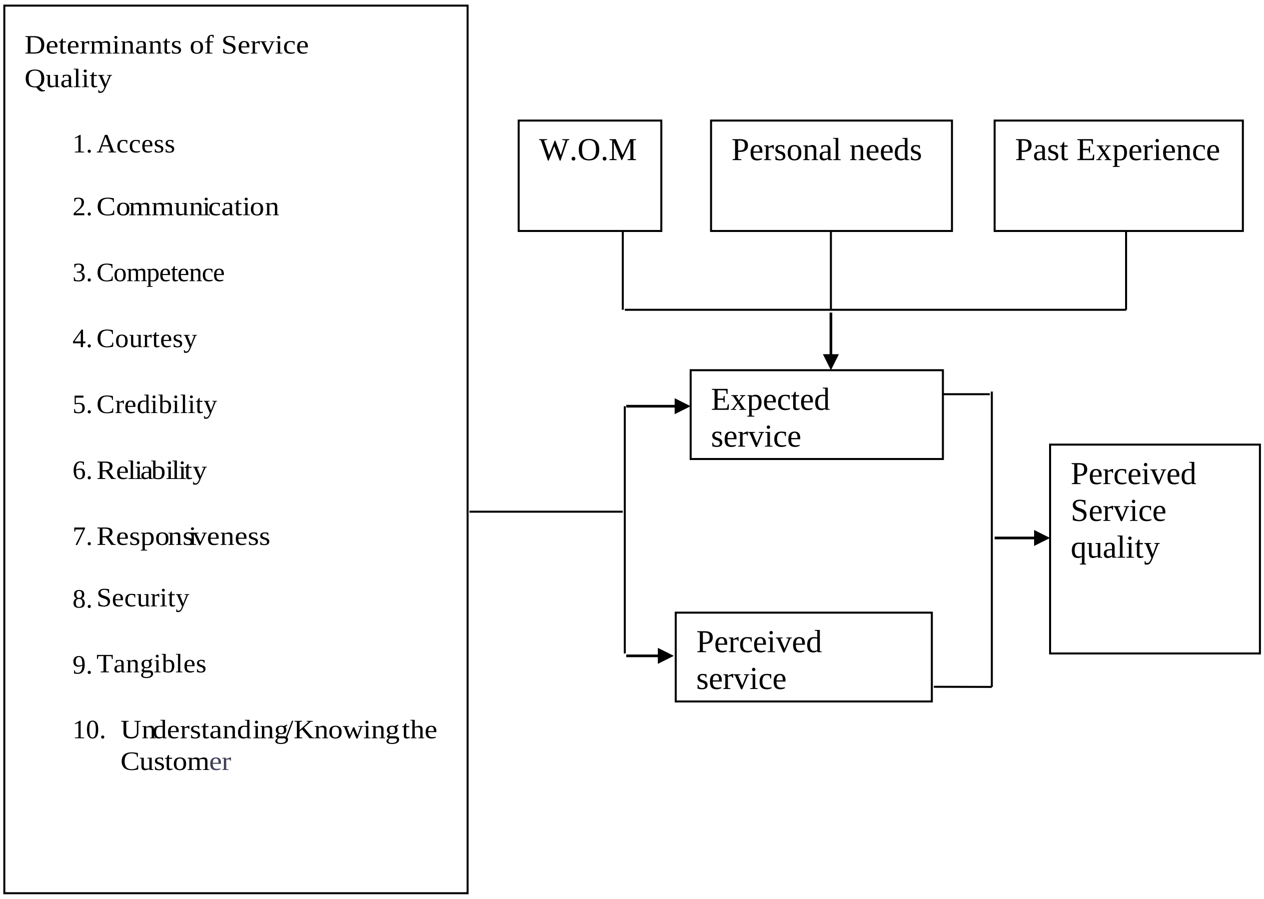


Figure 10: Perceived Service Quality Determinants
Source: Parasuraman et al. (1985:48)

According to Johnston (1995:54), in continuation of their research, Berry et al. (1985) realised that to some high level that there was a correlation between courtesy, communication, security, competence and credibility on one side and on the other side understanding and access. They were grouped into two dimensions: empathy and assurance. Therefore, the five dimensions of service quality then became reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness. These formed the basis of the SERVQUAL model and their service quality measurement tool. In their conclusion, they reported that no matter the service being studied, reliability was the leading dimension, followed by responsiveness, then assurance and empathy. Of least concern to the customers was the dimension of tangibles.

In the field of service management, though these dimensions are the basis of applied research, they have come under some criticisms. In a study of retailing, Finn, and Lamb (1991) concluded that their findings were not a reflection of Berry et al. (1985) who believed that the determinants of service quality in almost all service industries would be included in their list that they developed and could not be used to evaluate quality in a wide spectrum of service organisations. Their personal conclusion was that the five dimensions of SERVQUAL were not enough to cover service quality in the retail industry and proposed new developments and changes. Cronin and Taylor (1992), in their study of service quality in banking, fast food and dry cleaning, found less support to the five dimensions suggested by Parasuraman et al. (1985).

Johnston et al. (1990) conducted a study that tested the comprehensive nature of service quality determinants developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) for ten UK service organisations. Following their analysis which supported Parasuraman et al.'s (1988) model determinants, they proposed a refined list consisting of 12 determinants namely: appearance, cleanliness, access, availability, competence, comfort, friendliness, courtesy, communication, security, reliability, and responsiveness (Johnston, 1995:55). One of the limitations of their empirical study was that it focused solely on what the organisation perceived as service not making use of customer data to identify service quality determinants.

In another study by Johnston and Silvestro (1990), customers' viewpoint to the 12 determinants of service quality were already identified. Five more determinants were recognised, namely: care, commitment, attentiveness, integrity, and functionality (Johnston, 1995:55). Other researchers have suggested their own determinants of service quality, though it may seem like it was based on the published works of Berry et al. (1985). For instance,

I. Walker (1990) said the key factors are the level product reliability, the nature of the delivery systems and the quality of the environment combined with good personal service of staff (attitude, skills, and knowledge).
II. Grönroos (1990) suggested six criteria of perceived service quality. These included attitudes and behaviours, professionalism, and skills, reliability, and trustworthiness, accessibility, and flexibility, reputation, and credibility as well as recovery.

III. Albrecht and Zemke (1985) proposed spontaneity, care and concern, problem solving and recovery.

IV. Armistead (1990) describes the dimensions as “firm” and “soft”. The “firm” dimension included time, free of fault and flexibility (recovering from mistakes, providing customised or additional services). While the “soft” dimension included style and safety (security, trust and confidentiality) (Johnston, 1995:55).

Researchers such as Carman (1990); Zhao, Bai, and Hui (2002); Cunningham and Young (2002); (Deb & Ahmed, 2018) and (Rajeswari & Kumari, 2014) have applied the SERVQUAL and SERVPERF models in different service industries such as banking, libraries, retailing, hospitals, and tourism. Their findings revealed that there was failure to apprehend the dimensions specific to each industry. Therefore, one can conclude that service quality determinants are unique to each service industry (Puri and Singh, 2018). In this research, one of the secondary objectives was to identify the service quality determinant factors relevant in the TO industry in Cameroon as no previous studies on this topic was conducted before.

2.9 CONCEPTUALISATION OF SERVICE QUALITY

Although existing literature on service quality was huge, there was no generalised consensus on what service quality was and how it should be measured. The conceptualisation and evaluation of service quality have proven to be controversial and widely debated topics until present in literature on service marketing (Brady & Cronin, 2001). To conduct quality evaluation in a service organisation was more complex and challenging than in a physical product industry. According to Cunningham and Young (2002:4-5), an assessment of a service was not based on statistical quality measures such as managerial decisions but rather based on what was perceived by the customer as service. Because of the close direct relationship between organisational performance and the customer, practitioners and scholars have paid special interest in the “service quality” construct for the survival and growth of service organisations.

Many articles on service quality are analysed and several debates raised and was still ongoing on how to conceptualise and conduct service quality assessment (Brady et al., 2001). Finding a unique standard evaluation and conceptualisation method applicable in the service framework and common to all customers was now the cause of disagreement. Because of the differences in customer's opinion about quality and perception, it was rather difficult. Two main factors could be the reason for this difficulty: the nature and the formation of service quality. These would be examined and developed in the next paragraphs.

2.9.1 The nature and evidence of service quality

In the literature on service quality, the disconfirmation theory was the basis for traditional conceptualisations. In this theory, quality perception is seen as a result of the comparison between a standard to a particular performance (Polyakova & Mirza, 2015; Suuroja, 2003:11). Grönroos (1984:37) defined the service quality perception as the result of an assessment process in which customers compared their service expectations with what they have received. This view was equally supported by Parasuraman et al. (1988:15) in his definition of service quality concept. Expectations are viewed as simply the customer's wants of what should be offered by the service provider.

Cronin and Taylor (1992) took a different stance on the matter. They argued that it was inadequate to just consider the conceptualisation of service quality as a gap between customer expectation and perception of performance. Pointing out the controversy in literature concerning the relation of service quality versus satisfaction, they noted the service quality concept should be about the attitude of the customer towards a service given that customer satisfaction was about the disconfirmation of expectations.

Cronin and Taylor (1992) eventually discarded the expectation section of the SERVQUAL model terming it as "performance-only measure". This led to the development of the SERVPERF model which proved in different studies to have a better performance than the SERVQUAL model. Replying to this critique, Parasuraman et al. (1993:145) contended that though the SERVQUAL model was short in reliability and validity, it offered the advantages of a richer and more investigative information with better accuracy. Parasuraman et al. (1993:145) retested their model in 1994 and conceded that indeed the SERVQUAL model had issues with factor loadings. The structure was different from the original version published in 1988 as the factor analysis revealed only three dimensions: tangibles; reliability and the last one was a blend of empathy, assurance, and responsiveness (Polyakova & Mirza, 2015; Suuroja, 2003:19).

According to Cronin et al. (1992), the attitude-based conceptualisation argued for an assessment on performance or importance-weight evaluation of specific service attributes; a view that was later supported by several authors (Polyakova & Mirza, 2015) and (Suuroja, 2003:11). Suuroja (2003:12) and Teas (1993; 1994) criticised the disconfirmation theory (Gitonga, 2021), arguing that it was hypothetically impossible for performance levels exceeding the ideal standard of a customer should be assessed and rated as higher than standards generally considered as "ideal". However, Teas went further to establish other service quality perception models based on quality of norm and assessed performance. He concluded that the assessed performance model could surmount some of the associated problems of the expectation-perception performance gap of service quality conceptualisation.

According to Parasuraman et al. (1988), considering instruments that measure service quality, the SERVQUAL model has pulled much attention from scholars (Deb & Ahmed, 2018) and (Rajeswari & Kumari, 2014). The scale evaluates service quality as a calculable gap able to be gauged between service expectations of a customer and their assessments of the service based on the five dimensions. According to Sharma and Stafford (2000), though expectations are seen as a very important influential factor, it was not considered as part of perceived quality.

Analytical studies have shown that evaluation of a service should be based on the perceived service quality and not as a gap between expectations and perception of performance. It was rightly concluded that customer expectation could be influential on service quality perception but may not have a too direct effect.

2.9.2 The formation and evidence of service quality

Traditional models of service quality saw perceptions of service quality as multi-dimensional. According to Polyakova and Mirza (2015) and Suuroja (2003:12), service quality cannot be seen as a single construct, instead it was an aggregate of several components or dimensions. However, no general agreement exists about the nature of these dimensions. According to Grönroos (1984) (cited in Puri & Singh, 2018), two dimensions define the perceptions of the service process i.e., what they get and how they get it, namely: the technical quality and the functional quality. These two dimensions are based on the service production process chain. It could be considered an action approach which was time bound. The corporate image only filters either in favour of, neutral or does not favour the perception quality. All these depend on how the customers regard the service as whether good, neutral, or bad.

Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1991) suggest that could be seen from three quality dimensions:

I. The physical quality: This included the physical environment and instruments.
II. The interactive quality: This comes as a result of the style of exchange between the service provider's interactivity and the customer's participation.
III. The corporate quality: This simply means assessing the organisation's image.

One can consider these dimensions as the baseline sources of quality in any service organisation.

Taking a closer look at the dimensions outlines by Grönroos (1984) and Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1991), there are some common points though not totally overlapping. The approaches are viewed as having different abstraction levels with the two-dimensional approach considered as the higher-level one to the three-dimensional approach. Going by Lehtinen et al. (1991), the process and output are related to the physical quality. The interactive quality was related to the process quality, but corporate quality could already be assessed before the service process (Polyakova & Mirza, 2015**;** Suuroja, 2003:13).

Looking at the different views of other researchers on the conceptualisation of service quality shows some quirks. For instance, while some authors focus on the differences in the service quality dimensions by phrasing the factors differently, others look at the level of the factors in general (Suuroja, 2003:16). A general framework for perceived service quality was developed based on several of different theoretical works (Figure 11). It shows the main convergent and divergent points of views in the theories based on the process of service delivery with a mark difference between the service process and outcome used by customers to assess service quality. The framework presented in Figure 11 was an illustration from several authors on the components of the general environment, process, and outcome dimensions. It also indicates the nature and formation of service quality.

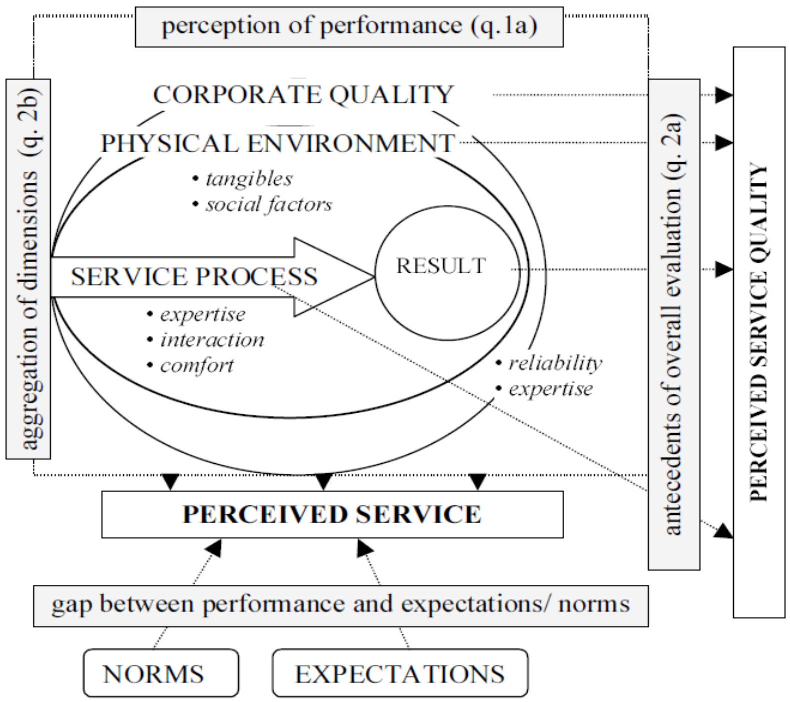


Figure 11: General Framework of Perceived Service Quality
Source: Suuroja (2003:16)

2.10 SUBSTITUTE SERVICE QUALITY CONCEPTUALIZATIONS

The essence of the service quality concept/theory was its qualities dependent on the customer's verdict (Berry et al., 1990). Owing to the customer-centric nature of service quality, the development of models focused on the customer. Tih (2006) identified three approaches to service quality models, namely: the single perspective (represented by the Nordic and SERVQUAL models), the multi-level perspective and the integrative perspective. Other concepts are proposed by other researchers because of the absence of the environmental and/or physical dimensions to service quality assessment (Polyakova & Mirza, 2015; Puri & Singh, 2018). These models are presented and discussed elaborately in the next paragraphs.

I. The Rust and Oliver Model, 1994

Rust and Oliver (1994) developed a service quality model founded on three attributes: service product, service quality and service environment as illustrated in Figure 12. This model was applied in several studies in other fields such as amusement parks and fast food (Brady & Cronin, 2001) and electronic services (Fassnacht & Koese, 2006) (Polyakova & Mirza, 2015).

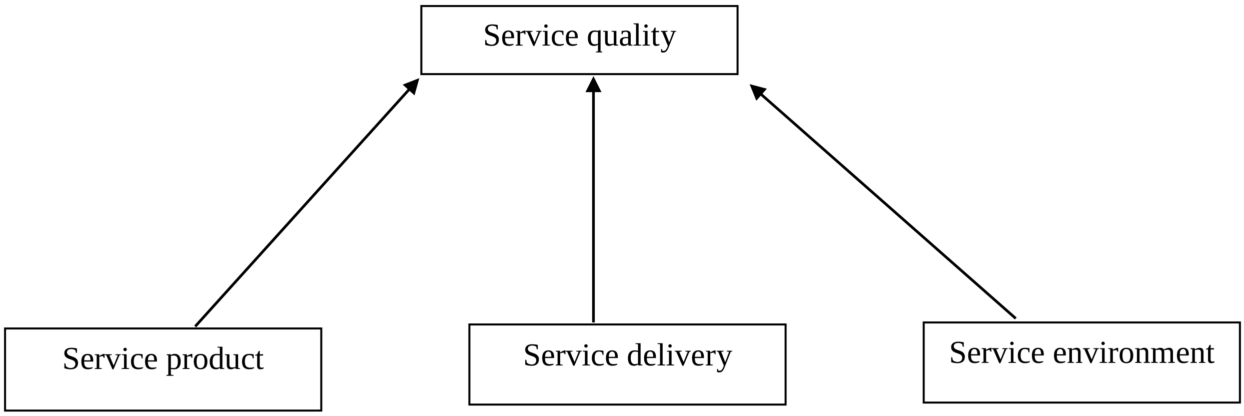


Figure 12: Rust and Oliver's 3 Component Model of Service Quality
Source: Cited in Polyakova and Mirza (2015:69)

The advantage of this model over the disconfirmation model was the addition of the environmental component. This model paved the way for future suggestions such as the multilevel model.

II. The Multilevel Model

Over the passage of time, different researchers have tried to integrate and apply the SERVQUAL and SERVPERF models in different industries. According to Parasuraman et al. (1994), researchers should pay more attention on the "dimensionality" of the concept of service quality and not only to study how service quality was measured. Some researchers proposed newly integrated service quality concepts (Polyakova & Mirza, 2015; Brady and Cronin 2001; Dabholkar et al., 1996).

The hierarchical model developed by Dabholkar et al., (1996) suggests that the dimensions of quality service must be seen essentially as higher order constructs having several sub-dimensions (Polyakova & Mirza, 2015) (see Figure 13). In their study of retail service quality, they tested the hierarchical conceptualisation that was composed of three levels:

I. Customer perception of service quality;
II. Primary dimensions of service quality; and
III. Sub-dimensions of service quality.

According to Brady and Cronin (2001), the hierarchical model acknowledges retail services as a higher order.

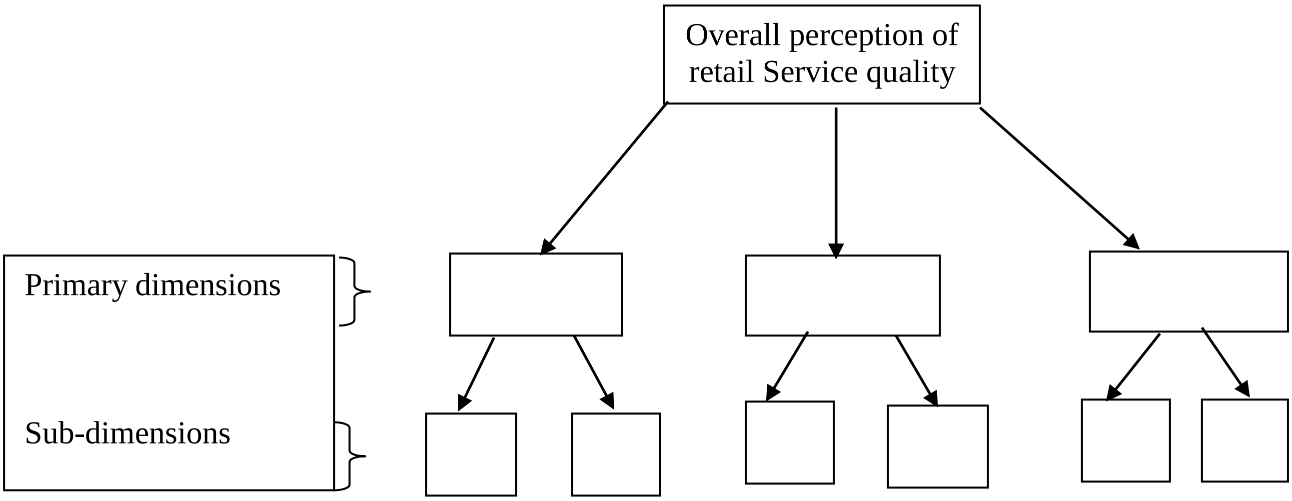


Figure 13: Service Quality Hierarchical Model
Source: Adapted from Brady and Cronin (2001) cited in Polyakova & Mirza (2015:72)

Within eight service industries, Brady and Cronin (2001) applied the three-factor concept of service quality. In their hypothesis, they considered the three dimensions of functional quality, the service environment, and the technical quality (Puri & Singh, 2018; Polyakova & Mirza, 2015). The SERVQUAL five service quality dimensions, where then incorporated. Their concept was centred on the fact that if the perception of service quality represented a hidden variable, then there must be some specific thing that was reliable, responsive, empathetic, assuring and tangible. In trying to identify that something, Brady and Cronin (2001) through their study proved that:

I. Customers were responsible for forming the service quality perceptions based on their assessment of the three primary dimensions.
II. The primary dimensions contain multiple sub-dimensions.
III. Reliability, responsiveness and empathy modify the sub-dimensions.

They suggested a multi-level hierarchical concept as seen in Figure 14.

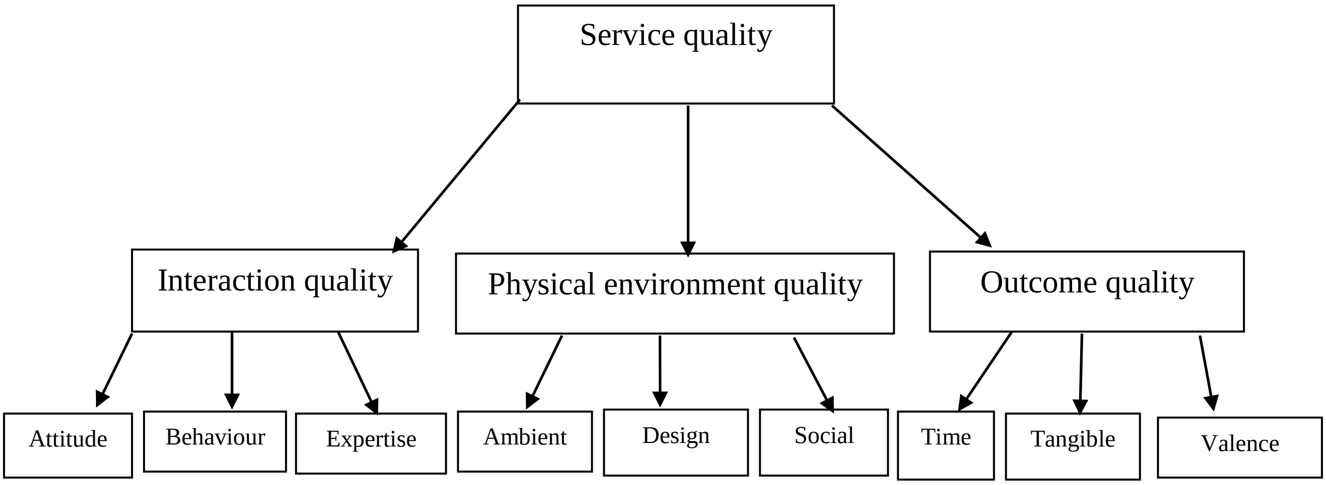


Figure 14: Brady and Cronin multi-level service quality model
Source: Adapted from Brady and Cronin (2001) cited in Polyakova and Mirza (2015:71)

The multi-level hierarchical service quality concept suggested by Brady and Cronin (2001) (cited in Polyakova & Mirza, 2015:71) was tested empirically within the travel industry (Ho, 2007), hotel services (Wilkins et al., 2007) and electronic services (Fassnacht & Koese, 2006). Desmukh et al. (2004) and Ladhari (2008) carried out an extended review of 19 service quality models from 1984 to 2003 of service quality measurement in 30 studies. In their conclusion, though several other models developed appeared in the literature for over two decades, SERVQUAL remained the championing model widely applied in different industries regardless of its criticisms (applicability and psychometric properties).

III Dynamic process model of service quality

This model was developed and established by Boulding, Kalra, Staelin and Ziethaml (1993:7). Based on the Bayesian-like framework, the founders came up with an attitude-based process construct of perceived quality service. In this concept, the service quality dimension’s perceptions was seen as a function of the expectations prior to the experience to be encountered by a customer. Simply put as the “what will” and “what should” happen during a service exchange in connection with the recent encounter of the customer in a service delivery cycle. Of course, it was the service quality dimension’s perceptions that form the baseline of one’s overall quality perception of a service which further forecasts one’s behavioural intentions. Longitudinal laboratory experiment data were used to first test the model from which a method to estimate the model with one-time data survey was established. They further appraised the construct using field data. Findings from the empirical study of the two tests of the model showed that the different kinds of customer expectations were contradicting quality service perception and that the perception of service quality had a positive impact on behavioural intent (Boulding et al. 1993:7). This model was illustrated in Figure 15.

The model consists of the different existing kinds of expectation relationships, quality service perceptions and overall perceived service quality and intention of behaviour. According to the authors, before any service transaction commences there already was some kind of expectation of the "will" and/or "should" service from the customer. The difference between the pre-conceived expectation and the real service delivered would rise in the overall perception on services delivered on each dimension. The perception of the dimension of quality service leads up to a total evaluation of service quality which further leads to the outcome in behavioural intention (Boulding et al., 1993:13).

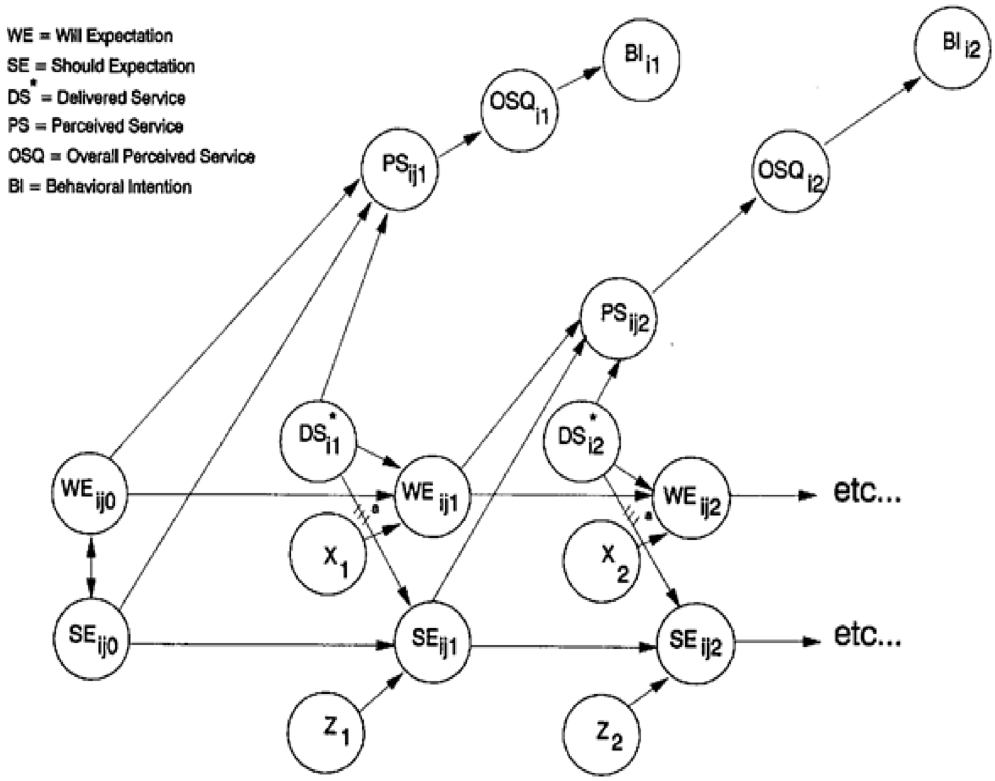


Figure 15: A dynamic process model of service quality
(Source: Boulding et al. 1993:12)

2.11 SERVICE QUALITY DIMENSIONS AND ATTRIBUTES

Numerous studies were concluded in the area of service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1988). According to Parasuraman et al. (1988), service quality involves three dimensions:

I. The technical quality of outcome: Meaning the reality of the service encounter and what the process leads to for the customer. The outcome of the service provision can most at times be assessed by the customer objectively.
II. The service encounter's functional quality: This service quality attribute focused on the relationship existing among the one providing a service and the customer receiving the service all of which was understood subjectively. It shows how the service process functions.
III. The corporate image: This relates to the customers' perception of the service provider. This was dependent on the following different considerations like price, external communications, physical location, technical and functional qualities, competence and behaviour of employees and site appearance (Puri & Singh, 2018:475; Felix, 2017:4).

Similarly, Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1982) also assert that service quality has three dimensions; however, it was different from the service quality dimensions described by Grönroos (1984). They included:

I. Corporate quality: Looks at the profile and image of the organisation.
II. Interactive quality: It was the resulting outcome of the connection among the staff of a service organisation and the customer just like the connection from customer to customer.
III. Physical quality: For instance, items like how the buildings appear as well as working equipment.

In addition, Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1982) argue that while investigating service quality determinants, one must distinguish amid quality related to the service delivery process and the quality linked to the service outcome. Comparing the work between Lehtinen and Swartz drew some distinctions concerning the dimensions of service quality (Lehtinen et al. 1982; Swartz et al. 1989). They stated that what the service delivered (physical quality) was evaluated after performance. According to Grönroos, this dimension was called "technical quality" (Puri & Singh, 2018:475; Lehtinen et al. 1982). Lehtinen and Swartz also asserted how the service was delivered (interactive quality) and evaluated during delivery. This dimension was equally known as functional quality (Puri & Singh, 2018:475; Lehtinen et al., 1982). Parasuraman et al. (1985) gave a detailed outline of perceptual service quality dimension (a psychological construct of how customers classify various elements of perception) through focus group studies listed as: competence; responsiveness; reliability; courtesy; access; credibility; communication; tangibles; security; and customer understanding.

According to Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimons (2006:108), the evaluation of service quality happens during the service supply process controlled by five principal dimensions used by customers to judge service. They included tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy as show in figure 16.

I. Tangibility: This included the presentation of the equipment, personnel, communication gadgets, and the physical facilities.
II. Reliability: It represents the service performance level done in an accurate and dependable manner.
III. Responsiveness: This refers to the ability to respond to customer requirements and to provide prompt service.
IV. Assurance: It was the knowledge, courtesy, confidence, and ability to convey trust of the employees. Key features are respect for the customer and politeness.
V. Empathy: It was the level of personal attention and customer care given to customers by the service provider including sensitivity, approachability and understanding of customers' needs.

Service quality could be considered as the mean of the performance versus expectancy gaps existing along these five dimensions.

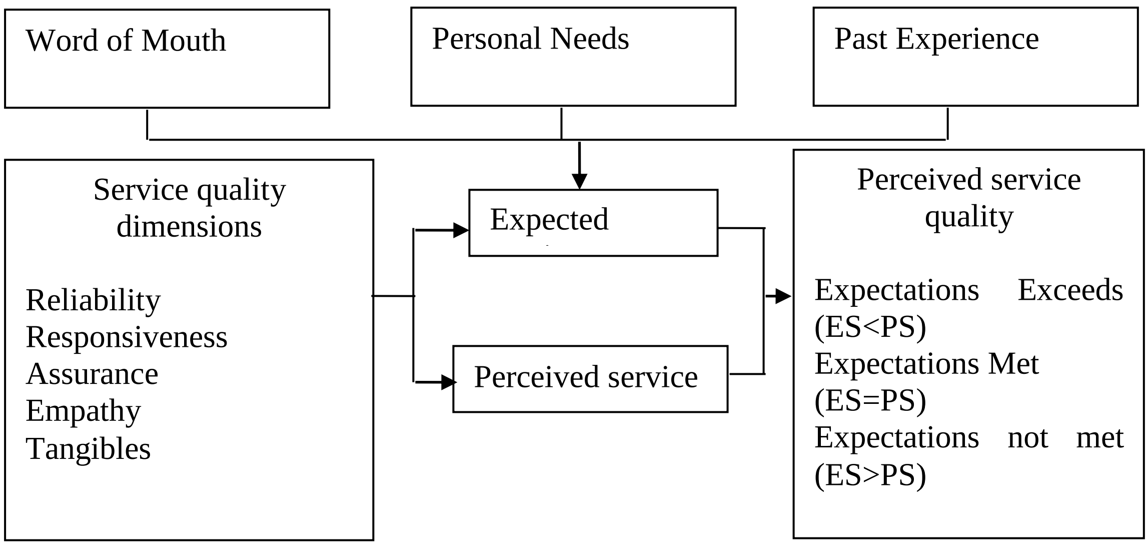


Figure 16: Perceived Service Quality

Source: Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons (2006:108)

These five dimensions appear again along with the scale developed to measure them called "SERVQUAL" scale. Through the dimensions, customer's mindset about service quality related information was set up (Zeithaml et al., 2006). Carman (1990) conducted some further research to assess the stability of these dimensions. He realised that reliability, tangibility, and assurance (security) presented as important while some weaker dimensions are subject to change based on the type of service studied.

Previous studies have shown that the most prominent models have viewed service quality in the form of a multi-attribute/multidimensional concept (Sayareh et al., 2016:205) such as wide usage of the SERVQUAL model. Studies using the SERVQUAL model are contained in several publications in different service domains, for instance, airline industry (Cunningham et al., 2002); hotels (Saleh & Ryan, 1992) and retailing (Zhao et al., 2002).

However, based on empirical analysis of preceding studies, there are still unresolved issues about the number of dimensions depending on the service industry. According to Suuroja (2003), the findings show the existence of nine clear dimensions (Polyakova & Mirza, 2015). Saleh and Ryan (1991) conducted a study within the hotel industry and identified five factors namely: empathy, conviviality, reassurance, tangibles, and avoiding sarcasm. These factors put together showed 78.6% variance in service quality. According to Brady and Cronin (2001), service quality could be considered as having three components. From Grönroos' technical and functional quality was added to the service environment. The hierarchical model was shown in Figure 17.

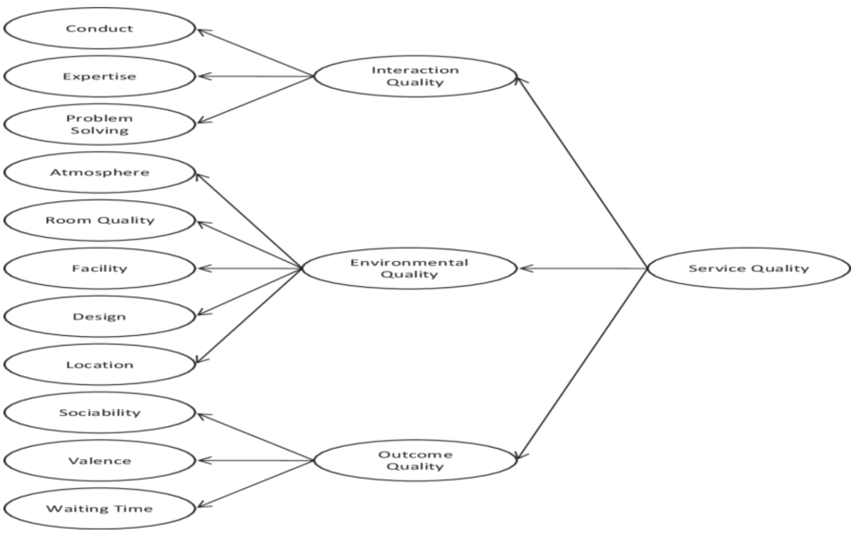


Figure 17: The Hierarchical Model of Service Quality

Source: Brady and Cronin (2001:37)

Brady and Cronin (2001) proposed that the dimensions (interaction, outcome and environment) consisting of three sub-dimensions and customers would sum up these three sub-dimensions to come up with their perception of the performance level of the organisation about the three dimensions. Based on a performance assessment at several levels by customers, they add up these assessments to develop a general perception of service quality.

Dabholker, Shepherd and Thorpe (2000:162) conducted a study on service quality assessment. They realised that different customers had different evaluation attributes in relation to a service, but the general assessment of service quality was not the sum of the dimensions. Hence, the factors of service quality are perceived as antecedents rather than components. This led them to develop a multilevel model (see Figure 18) of service quality within the context of the retail industry.

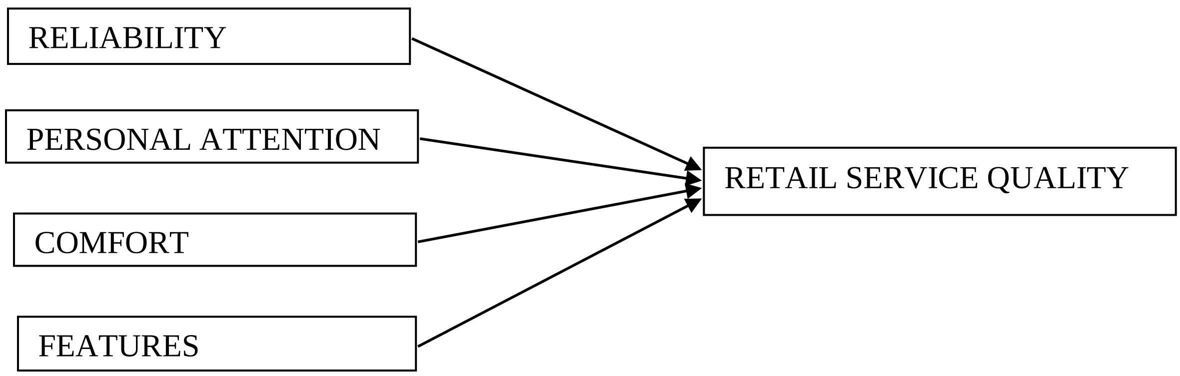


Figure 18: The Multilevel Model of Retail Service Quality
Source: Dabholker, Shepherd and Thorpe (2000:162)

Some authors have suggested that service quality in a way was complicated when it comes to determining factors specific to a particular industry. In some industries, it was easy and unidimensional while in others it was complex. Therefore, one can rightly conclude that the dimensions of service quality are dependent on what kind of service was offered. Buttle (1986) asked the question on what effect does the involvement of a customer have on service quality dimensionality. He concluded that in case of low level of involvement, customers use fewer dimensions to evaluate service quality and vice versa.

Owing to failure in standardising perceived quality dimensions, many studies have expressed the need for a more tailored approach towards the dimensions of service quality in the different service industries owing to uniqueness of the determinants and service features related to each service industry (Suuroja, 2003:22). Hence, future studies should focus on the characteristics in the different industries of service quality perception.

2.11.1 Service provider's perspective of service quality dimensions

In this section, the following secondary objective would be achieved:

I. To understand the concept of service quality from the approach of ITO managers, employees as well as customers.

Service involved a give and take exchange built on a certain platform by the giver and the taker. It was vital from the marketing perspective to consider both the management as well as customer's views for acquiring in-depth knowledge and understanding into service quality (Brown & Swartz, 1989). Management (service provider) designed, developed, and delivered a service based on his or her understanding of the perception of the customer's expectations likewise any changes to the service offering likely to move the position of management's perception based on the customer's experiences (Brown & Swartz, 1989).

Quality was perceived differently by both the one providing the service and the one consuming the service (Parasuraman et al., 1985) which in fact led to the rise of different conceptual models of service quality (Sharpley & Forster, 2003). For instance, according to Nightingale (1985), the lack of service quality was the gap difference existing between the two qualities perceived by the provider and the customer. According to Parasuraman et al., (1985), some inconsistencies like the "communication gap" between service qualities tarnished service quality. Parasuraman et al. (1985) therefore proposed five service gaps whereas Grönroos (1983) showed two types of service quality: the technical (what the customer actually received) and the functional (how the service was delivered to the customer or service performance). Customers rated this perception in a highly idiosyncratic way, and it was said that service quality could be enhanced through focus on the fundamentals of the functional quality (Narayan et al., 2009).

Existing research on the evaluation of multiple group perceptions of various service meetings proposed that both service providers and customers did not see experience in the same light.

Witter (1985) conducted a study of retailers versus tourists within a resort setup. He realised that retailers rated their service more than tourists. It was also reported that both parties had differing views when it came to the examination of the importance of the degree of service delivered.

On the other hand, within the hotel setting, Saleh and Ryan (1991) noticed that the opinion of both the hotel service providers and customers showed about the same rating of service performance but for the tangibility of the hotel properties. However, there were reports on the differences in the gaps between expectations and performance between the provider and customer. In China's hotel industry, Tsang and Qu (2000) assessed service quality perceptions based on both the international tourists and the hotel managers' viewpoints. It was reported that in China, tourist's service quality perception was rated lower than anticipations whereas hotel managers overrated the service delivery (Narayan et al., 2009:83).

Juwaheer and Ross (2003) conducted a study in which they examined the customer's perception and expectation of service provided by hotels in Mauritius. The findings showed that hotel managers' perceptions of tourist's expectations and the tourist actual expectations were measured, and it was realised that 28 items out of a total of 39 items, the difference in the mean scores between management and customers were not statistically significant (Narayan et al. 2009:83).

In a related study, Coyle and Dale (1993) assessed quality service that looked at the perspectives of the service provider as well as the customer within the hospitality industry which revealed some existing gaps such as employees' capability to effectively deliver results on their tasks. Managers saw this as a vital element in providing good service, but was refuted by customers as important in their opinion. To customers, things like decoration, hygiene and infrastructure (tangibles of service) had a low ranking than managers' expectations. Worthy of note in their study was the fact that they proposed as a principal cause of the gaps in service quality, the supposition that managers believe they know everything. Hence, senior managers charged with understanding the customer's expectations miss out on the point of always putting the customer first given that they had the least contact with them.

Vogt and Fesenmaier (1995) conducted some research to measure the perceptions of service levels between retailers and tourists in a tourism destination. The findings showed that there was evidence suggesting that service performance according to customers was more favourable compared to the service provider’s view of customers’ experiences. Nevertheless, there was no evidence to prove that the service provider factor structure for the assessment of service was the same as the customer factor structure. It was realised that customers assess a service based on the type of service provider instead of the type of service itself.

Several studies conducted in the past have shown significant differences on the customer and the service provider’s expectations of service quality especially in the hotel industry. For instance, Nightingale (1986) proved in his study that strong evidence existed that the management perception of quality service mostly differed from customer perceptions. Lewis (1987), in a hotel industry study that evaluated the service quality gap, compared management perception of the expectation of guests and the actual expectations of guests. It was realised for the most part that it was the belief of management that guests’ expectations were higher than what they actually received. This was supported by Nel (1993) in another study in which similar outcomes were obtained. He found that management had some fairly good understanding of the customer’s expectations.

From studies conducted in various industries discussed above such as hotel and retail industries, parallel measurement items are requested of the service provider and the customer. According to Narayan et al. (2009:83), certain additional items need to be included when asking questions from service providers because in delivering a service. To him, the service provider must examine the relevant processes of service quality from within the organisation. According to Bailey (1994), this was called the “invisible two-thirds of service”. This was composed of the following items presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Additional items to measure service quality: service providers’ perspective.

Invisible two-thirds	➢ Staff awareness of customer’s needs ➢ Fastness in service recovery ➢ Checking customer satisfaction ➢ Flexibility to accept changes in the customer wants ➢ Providing support to service providers ➢ Bureaucracy in managerial procedures ➢ Additional training and human resource development

Source: Adapted from Narayan et al. (2009:84)

O'Neill et al. (2000) argue that for good service quality delivery, processes, systems, and procedures must be well designed to cater for the needs of both the internal as well as the external customers. For this to be attained, the organisation should do the following actions.

I. Be customer-centric and customer-driven.
II. Be flexible to deal with individual customer needs as well as provide fast and efficient recovery from service failure.
III. Monitor performance and consider changing customer needs.
IV. Support front office staff to provide better customer service
V. Monitor internal performance and consider adding human resources requirements.

2.11.2 Service quality measurement item scales

In this section, the following secondary objective would be achieved:

I. To identify the service quality determinant factors unique to the ITO industry.
II. To explore the major determinants of service quality as perceived by experts in the ITO industry.

Tourism businesses are there to serve customers and make them come back. Therefore, customers expect to get a run for their money via quality service offered by the service provider be it travel agent, TO, hotel or even restaurants and would not want to settle for less. To be able to achieve this customer attraction and retention, service quality from the service provider must be constantly at top level during the service production and delivery phases (O'Neill & McKenna, 1994).

A proper understanding of the customer perception and perspective was required for managers to ensure service quality and not what management perceives to be the market demand. Having sound knowledge of the customer need was a guarantee of competitive advantage as it provides tailored solutions to customer needs. According to Grönroos (1984), an organisation must identify first and understand the customer's perspective with regards to service quality to produce, deliver and maintain quality service.

With the understanding that service quality was unique to each industry, Narayan, Rajendran, Sai and Gopalan (2009:74) through an extensive literature review in an exploratory study carried out, proposed ten dimensions of service quality relevant to tourism. These comprise logistics, core-tourism experience, hygiene, information, value for money, hospitality, price fairness, amenities, security, and food. It should be noted that these dimensions on their own cannot be directly evaluated. They identified several assessment variables for each dimension. These dimensions would be briefly examined in the next paragraphs.

Here now was a brief description of the ten-dimensional items of service quality vis-à-vis tourism (especially TOs) together with their item scales for measurement which are later applied in this research.

1 Core-*tourism service experience*

The core service was the main service product itself and refers to why a service exists (Sureshchandar et al., 2002). This depends on each individual and/or destination. The characteristic features of a service are as important as the way it was delivered (Rust & Oliver, 1994). Taking the case of a tour company, the tour package composed of hotel, food and beverage, transport, leisure activities etc. proposed to tourists was very important. The way such services all combined in a package are delivered to customers gives that sense of service quality and enables them to rate whether they are getting a high or low value for their money.

Within the tourism industry, the core services of each industry (restaurant, hotel, TO etc.) vary and are unique. Despite this, there are some commonalities that cut across them. Despite the much research conducted around service quality dimensions, little was mentioned or considered of core tourism service experience as an important dimension of service quality (Narayan et al., 2009:78). However, some researchers did consider other points such as sightseeing (Chadee & Mattson, 1996), attractions (Panton, 1999), recreation experience (Burns et al., 2003) as important dimensions of service quality.

Based on the study conducted by Narayan et al. (2009:77), an 11-item scale to measure core experience was developed. They are:

I. Natural beauty;

II. Climate;

III. Variety of landmarks
IV. Richness of cultural heritage;
V. Sightseeing and recreational services at touristic sites;
VI. Exchange of cultural values;
VII. Nearness to nature;
VIII. Possibility for enjoyment
IX. Prospect to recreate without meddling;
X. Serene environment; and
XI. Atmosphere for leisure (Narayan et al. 2009:77).

2 *Information*

The right and availability of information to a customer (tourist) was vital and necessary for the giving a competitive edge. From the search stage to undertaking the travel and even while at the destination, the power of information cannot be underestimated. The service provider such as a TO through its various service stages of the tour package disseminates information useful for building the customer perception. Information touch points for customers included information desks at travel agencies or TO offices and airports, travel departments at embassies available on and offline. Such information was presented in the form of brochures, wall posters or online posts among others. It was no doubt that information and communication technology (ICT) has revolutionised communication, and it was a do or die affair for service providers in the tourism industry. In the information exchange process between the customer and the service provider, the language of communication was a crucial factor (Yuksel & Yuksel, 2001). The dimension of information should be considered very important for tourist satisfaction (Burns et al., 2003). The six-item scale to measure the "information" construct proposed by Narayan et al. (2009:78) included:

I. tourist information centre present at airports;
II. visitor information centre present at destination (accomodation);
III. tourist information centre present touristic sites;
IV. visitor guide in tourist bus;
V. tourist guide at touristic sites; and
VI. Ease of communication in a shared language.

3 *Hospitality*

This generally refers to the warm welcome given to customers, guests, or visitors. Tourism principally was about offering and providing warmth and giving comfort to the customer by the service provider like TOs. Customers would expect to be treated courteously and in a friendly manner from the very first contact point; for instance, at main port of entry or airport (Burns et al., 2003), hotel reception desks, TO information service etc. Arriving in a new environment, the customer would expect to be at home away from home. Customers always expect real value for their money. At the hotels, customers need prompt reactions and responses to their complaints. Authors such as Poon and Low (2005), Kozak (2001) and Yuksel and Yuksel (2001) considered hospitality as an important point of tourism service quality dimension. There are ten-items scales suggested to measure this service quality dimension. They included:

I. politeness of immigration officers at port of entry;
II. how TO receives and welcomes the tourist;
III. courtesy at the hotel;
IV. trustworthy nature of employees at hotel facility;
V. trustworthy nature away from hotel facility;
VI. how do staff respond to customer complaints;
VII. responsive attitude of persons away from hotel facility;
VIII. staff behaviour towards female tourists at hotel facility;
IX. staff behaviour towards female tourists away from hotel facility; and
X. behaviour of other tourists (Narayan, 2009:79).

4 *Price fairness*

It was a common phenomenon at most destinations to realise that the price for a particular service given to a local was given at a higher price to a tourist, foreigner or even stranger. Maybe because of the colour of the skin, a local taxi driver would charge more for a tourist from the airport to a hotel down-town or the city centre than would be charged a local or national covering the same distance. One of the reasons of such a practice was the non-awareness or lack of available information to the tourist or stranger. Or it could even be owing to ignorance. This unfair practice to tourists of customers was seized as an opportunity for others (taxi drivers, petit traders etc.) to profit and make some extra gain. Somehow, it turns to an income generating venture for many locals at destinations. Consequently, tourists or customers become unhappy and dissatisfied. According to Narayan (2009), previous studies in western countries showed that there was impact of difference in pricing on tourist satisfaction. However, studies in south Asian countries have shown interest in measuring how pricing affects tourist's satisfaction levels. The four-item scales developed to measure fairness in price included:

I. cost fairness at leisure entry points (same entry fee for both locals and foreigners);
II. cost fairness at place of temporary residence (same fee for a night stay for both locals and foreigners);
III. same prices for items at shopping areas applicable to all buyers; and
IV. harmonisation of fares for taxi drops to both foreigners and locals.

5 *Hygiene*

Hygiene plays a very important role at a destination. In developing countries (especially in sub-Saharan countries), the hygienic conditions leave much to be desired compared to destinations of other developed countries. Most often when tourists move from a destination in a developed country to another destination in a developing country, the wide gap observed in hygiene was a serious call for concern. This fact has raised so much alarm that it has received the attention of many researchers (Kozak, 2001; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2001), for instance, hygiene and sanitation/ cleanliness at airports; leisure sites; restaurants; how clean the streets are as well as the hygienic level of food served at eateries (Tribe & Snaith, 1998; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2001). In a country like India, the presence of many street beggars was alarming (Chaudhary, 2000); the high presence of hawkers was indicative of sex tourism.

The eight-item scale proposed by Narayan et al. (2009:79) to measure this service quality dimension included:

I. Hygiene/cleanliness at port of entry (airports);
II. Hygiene/cleanliness at hotel facility;
III. Hygiene/cleanliness at leisure sites;
IV. Hygiene/cleanliness at eateries outside accommodation;
V. Hygiene/cleanliness of the streets;
VI. Hygienic condition of the food;
VII. Presence of beggars as a hindering factor; and
VIII. Presence of street hawkers as a hindering factor.

6 *Value for Money*

According to Fornell et al. (1996), value was considered as the price paid for a given type of quality. Value for money gives a balance in terms of price and quality. In a TO, the tourist would expect value for money alongside respect when being provided with hotel, food or restaurant services, or even at touristic attraction sites (Yuksel and Yuksel, 2001) and during shopping (Chaudhary, 2000). For a tourist spending money to get a service, quality was the watchword for getting real standard that would lead to customer satisfaction. When considering the ACSI model, perceived value was regarded a precursor of customer satisfaction (Fornell et al., 1996). However, few authors accept the value for money as a dimension of quality service in tourism literature (Narayan et al., 2009: 80). According to Narayan et al. (2009:81) price and its value (Yuksel and Yuksel, 2001), pricing and payment (Poon and Low, 2005) as well as price levels (Kozak, 2001) was considered by researchers as important factors of quality service dimension in their tourism study. According to Narayan et al. (2009:81), there was a six-item scale to measure monetary value.

I. Monetary value of tour package;
II. Monetary value of hotel;
III. Monetary value of flight;
IV. Monetary value of restaurant food outside accommodation;
V. Monetary value of transportation (local transport modes); and
VI. Monetary value during shopping.

7 Logistics

Transportation and logistics are vital for any tourism business dealing with customers. Tourists show much concern about the road infrastructural network and its accessibility at destinations (Kozak 2001; Yuksel & Yuksel 2001). The type of vehicles and the comfort it offers while going to such destinations must be carefully thought of by the service provider or TO service. Staff like the drivers and/or tour guides forming part of the logistics must be courteous all along the trip. This was the only way; a tourist was happy and satisfied. According to Narayan et al. (2009:81), a four-item scale was proposed as a dimension to measure service quality.

I. Accessibility to visitor attraction sites;
II. Attractions present at touristic site;
III. Infrastructural condition en route to touristic site; and
IV. Potential disruption by traffic.

8 *Food*

There are several reasons why tourists travel to a destination. Understanding the culture of that destination was an important point to consider. Trying to know and understand the cuisine of the local population always leaves a good experience. Others while on a trip would like to eat food that they are accustomed to back at their place of residence. Therefore, the food quality was primordial to the tourist in every tour package. Some researchers have considered the food as an important factor for service quality in their studies (Alampay, 2003; Panton, 1999; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2001). According to Narayan et al. (2009:81), there was a four-item scale to measure food as a service quality dimension.

a. Taste of local cuisine at the hotel;
b. Taste of local cuisine served at eateries outside the hotel;
c. Food availability (of tourist back home) at the hotel; and
d. Food availability (of tourist back home) at restaurants outside the hotel.

9 *Security*

Every tourist considers first and looks after their security when they choose to visit a destination. Areas of conflict are generally turned down by tourists as they would rather want to visit safe and pleasant places (Robinson, 2003). Countries in the Central African sub-region were the worst hit in terms of wars and conflicts and have suffered heavy losses and hindered the development of the tourism industry within the sub-region. This accounts for the poor influx of tourists into the sub-region compared to other sub-regions in Africa. Even now, security remains a big challenge for some of these countries. Increasingly, studies have considered security as an unavoidable service quality dimension when it comes to tourism (Poon & Low, 2005; Weiermair & Fuchs, 1999). Narayan et al., (2009:82) suggest a three-item scale to measure security as a dimension of service quality.

I. Security at place of vacation;
II. Safety at touristic sites; and
III. Safety of travel (airlines, buses, taxi etc.)

10 *Amenities*

Even though tourists are on vacation at far off distances away from normal working life, they would like to stay connected to what was happening at their places of residence, offices as well as friends and family. They would need while at a destination, amenities such as the internet and other ICT services (Tribe & Snaith, 1998), exchange of foreign currency, medical services (Chaudhary, 2000), restaurants and nightclubs. According to Yuksel and Yuksel (2001), having facilities at sites visited by tourists was an important component of providing a satisfying holiday experience. According to Narayan et al (2009:80), Kozak (2001) used facilities and activities in a study as factors to measure tourists' perceptions in Turkey and Spain. For this dimension, a ten-item measurement scale was suggested. These included:

I. Internet connectivity at airport;
II. Telecom services at accomodation;
III. Internet connections at place of vacation/ touristic sites;
IV. Telecom services as one travel;
V. Availability of money exchange house/ banks at airports;
VI. Money exchange services at place of residence;
VII. Money exchange services outside place of vacation;
VIII. Access to health services;
IX. Availability of pubs and drinking spots; and
X. Operating hours of pubs around accommodation.

It was important to see service quality from the viewpoint of the service provider as this will enable a complete comprehension of the service quality process and functioning. This was because the service provider was responsible for service delivery and it must match or surpass the expectations of the customer for the service to be rated as good.

2.12 SERVICE QUALITY MODELS PROPOSED BY ACADEMIC RESEARCH

The tourism industry offers services with strong psychological characteristic that was the way one reacts and feels towards an experience (Darfoon, 2013). Therefore, the issue of quality becomes very crucial. Studies on service quality are with regards to the SERVQUAL and SEVPERF models with adjustments. These modifications relate to new dimensions and used items in the construct. Research areas in tourism where service quality models were applied included travel agencies (Johns et al., 2004; Bigné et al., 2003), hospitality (Knutson et al., 1991; Fick & Ritchie 1991), parks, (Hamilton, Crompton, & More 1991; Fick and Ritchie 1991) and leisure services (Crompton, MacKay, & Fesenmaier 1991; Fick and Ritchie 1991).

Within four areas (hotels, airlines, ski, and restaurants) in the tourism industry, Fick and Ritchie (1991) used the SERVQUAL model. They conducted a survey divided into three parts of about 200 respondents from each of these service industries. The first part of the survey consisted of measuring the service quality expectations, the second part was to measure the service quality perception and then finally the third part was to measure the overall service quality. From their research, they concurred with Carman (1990) that the five dimensions and 22 items of the SERVQUAL may not apply in different areas of service. They further proposed that the SERVQUAL dimensions may not be enough in the tourism service industry as more could be added. Meanwhile, Crompton et al. (1991) conducted research on four recreation services and concluded that only four dimensions are applicable. The findings of their study showed a marked difference in dimensions though it showed some similarity with Carman (1990) and Teas (1993) on the addition of more importance to the item scale. For instance, they realised that tangibility dimension showed higher importance in hockey whereas assurance was more important to trip’s customers.

Hamilton et al. (1991) on the other hand realised in their research on visitor evaluation in eight parks that importance of dimension therefore varies within the same service. They proposed that in park studies, service quality measurement should be considered differently from one park to the other with regards to the ranking and essence of the dimensions.

There are several frameworks developed by researchers following the extension of the SERVQUAL model to give a new concept. For instance, the recreation and leisure industries service quality model (REQUAL) was developed by Mackay and Crompton (1988) (cited in Kamdem, 2017:11). Knutson, Stevens, Wullaert and Patton (1991) developed the LODGSERV model for the evaluation of hotel services while maintaining the original dimensions. For travel agencies, Le Blanc (1992) realised that the dimension of brand image should be included in the service quality dimensions. In more recent research, Pakdil and Aydin (2007) developed for the airline, a weighted SERVQUAL after they added four more dimensions (availability, employees, flight pattern and image) to the original SERVQUAL dimensions. This created an appropriate measurement scale for airline service quality. Among the findings of their study, they discovered that the level of education and passengers past experiences obviously affects the passengers’ expectations and experience.

Albacete-Saez, Fuentes-Fuentes and Liorens-Montes (2007) developed a modified SERVQUAL scale to measure service quality in nature-based tourism with special focus on rural tourism. They had seven dimensions: complementary offers, personnel response, basic demand, tourist relations, security, empathy, and tangible elements. Their developed scale had 58 elements designed to measure the quality expectations and perceptions that were concurrently shared (Darfoon, 2013:35). Khan (2003) modified the SERVQUAL model to assess the service quality perception of tourists at eco-tourism destinations. He developed the ECOSERV model while Tribe and Snaith (1998) developed the HOLSAT model from the SERVQUAL model. This modified construct measured tourist’s satisfaction in holiday experiences.

Other scholars have modified other models. For instance, Caro and Garcia (2008) established a multidimensional model on service quality construct following that of Brady and Cronin (2001). Brady and Cronin (2001) aver that customer evaluation of service quality needed a multi-level scale that was made up of primary dimensions and sub-dimensions so as to measure service quality. Furthermore, Caro and Garcia (2008) after qualitative and quantitative analysis built the new model to measure service quality in travel agencies. In their study to measure the service quality in a tour operation system, Darfoon (2013:36) and Notably et al. (2004) used four instruments as a methodological comparison. These components included Performance Analysis, SERVQUAL, SERVQUAL, and SERFBERF. After data collection from 220 participants in collaboration with a major UK TO, a quality score was considered for each question using the following formulas:

I. Performance (P) – Importance (I)
II. Performance (P) – Expectations (E)
III. (Performance [P] – Expectations [E]) × Importance (I)
IV. Performance (P) only

The outcome of the study showed no difference in statistics in the four methods used despite the variety in their rankings which had thirteen different elements.

Some researchers are of the school of thought that measuring service quality in tourism should be more about measuring experience quality. This was because in many cases, what tourists perceive as quality was more linked to their experiences obtained throughout the whole visit rather than services delivered (Chen and Chen, 2010). In another study, Otto and Richie (2000) developed their construct by measuring the experience quality in tourism using four dimensions including: hedonics, peace of mind, involvement, and recognition. Other scholars like Haber and Lerner (1999) opine that the quality of experience and the satisfaction of tourists are dependent on the attractiveness of the location, number of services offered, management skills and the altitudes of personnel. According to Otto and Richie (2000), service experience was a major connector between the service quality experience and the satisfaction of tourist which included the service element composed of managerial roots and the service experience element having psychological roots (Darfoon, 2013).

In a typical tour package, TOs offer several services to participants such as transportation, professional tour guide, cultural and historical site visits as well as food and beverage service. Hotel service depends on the length of tour and type of facility. The kind of transportation means (coach, car, bus) would depend on the purpose and content of the tour. These can always be modified. Generally, the more the site (cultural and historical) attractions, the more visitors and tour are organized (Stetic, Simicevic & Stanic, 2011).

In the tour package literature, some of the most researched areas are motivation (Chang 2007), the expectations and quality perceptions of senior tourists (Jao & Lin, 2012), tour guide influence on total service quality (Huang, Hsu, and Chan, 2010), participant behaviour (Nishii & Jung, 2011), factors that determine coach excursions (Downward & Lumsdon, 1999), influential level of tour guide on total tour satisfaction (Melia, 2012; Wang & Lee, 2012). There was so far little or no research dwelling on an evaluation of ITO service quality. However, recent studies on the assessment of daily tours leading to the development of the DAILYSERV scale which sought to measure the service dimensions in a daily tour (Caber & Albayrak 2018:18). The suggested DAILYSERV scale comprised of 22 items and six dimensions (that is; transportation, food and beverage facilities, tour guide, shopping facilities, museums, touristic sites and stop over facilities.) The findings further showed that DAILYSERV had a high reliability and validity score.

Within the overall structure of tours together with their respective service dimensions, some remarkable studies included research conducted by Lin, Lee, and Chen (2009). Their study focused on examining guided tour service attributes and the key dimensions that affected satisfaction. They realised that there are five basic attributes of guided tours. These attributes included pre-tour information; hotel; restaurant; transportation; and beautiful spot. Stetic, Simicevic and Stanic (2011) conducted a qualitative study on the service performance of travel agencies using the analytic network approach. Stetic et al. (2011) carried out a conceptual analysis of daily tours and noted that such tours in rural destination management and development were important and relevant (Caber & Albayrak, 2018: 18).

Following the previous discussion one can rightfully state that literature on service quality models was wide and diverse, industry specific and was researched for quite a long time. However, no such model was mentioned anywhere in literature on the current topic of ITO service quality assessment model under study. Hence, this provides a tangible reason as to why such a study was relevant and has its place in tourism studies. Equally, through this study, more updated literature was added to the prevailing body of knowledge and made available on this research domain.

2.13 STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE SERVICE QUALITY

The secondary objective that would be achieved in this section was:

I. To identify areas of quality management aimed at improving service quality in the ITO industry.

Service quality within the context of quality management was all about the management process of service delivery to customers according to their individual expectations. In essence, it examines the level at which a service was offered so that its quality could be improved in the future, identify problems, and ensure they are corrected to improve on customer satisfaction. Always seeking means and ways to better service quality was what organisations need. Some of these policies and practices that improve service quality included observing the international quality standards (ISO 9000), developing a strategic orientation from the onset, quick recovery of failed service, and good marketing alignment. These strategies are necessary for tourism businesses such as TOs to gain international recognition respect and awards among their peers. The next paragraphs explore the different policies and practices that could help improve service quality.

2.13.1 Quality management systems (ISO 9000) standards

The ISO developed the ISO 9000 model for quality assurance. It was first introduced in 1987 and was continually being upgraded ISO 9004-2017 (Fonseca, 2015:170; Chiarini, 2017:310). It describes the quality management principles that are universally acceptable and practised within organisations to answer the needs of the customer as well as compliance to the regulations guiding the activities of that activity. ISO 9000 was a series of worldwide agreements published as International Standards. The technical committee of the International Standards Organization [ISO (TC) 176] developed a set of rules to serve as guides for the quality management and ensuring quality assurance (West, Giafrani & Tsiakals, 2017). As reported by the ISO (2017) report and Mak (2011:17), ISO 9000's objective was to support in global goods and services transactions. ISO certification of TOs builds a quality assurance base to offer consistent standards to tour services and products. It stresses the relevance of quality within the company and hopes to cajole the customer's recognition of value from a company that has undergone this rigorous procedure.

For effective quality to be ensured, the [ISO (TC) 176] established a list of seven quality management principles to which every organisation must adhere to obtain sustainable organisational success. These principles included "customer focused organisation, leadership abilities, commitment of people, suitable business processes, enhancement, evidence-based decision making and rapport management" (ISO, 2017; Fonseca, 2015:173). When an organisation was registered and certified under ISO, this builds confidence of quality assurance among its customers. The customers are always sure of the continuous monitoring and control. This also included service quality. In a study conducted by Mak (2011) on three TOs that were ISO 9000 certified between 1996-2006, some reasons advanced by TOs to be ISO 9000 certified included creating a solid corporate image; obtain better promotion and adverts; standardize all the different departments; better operational knowledge; examine the operational manual; better management; and empower the actions of hierarchy to make valuable changes.

ISO 9000 boosts organisational performance through the adoption of the process-based approach in the development, implementation, and improvement of quality management systems (Fonseca, 2015). Usually, ISO 9000 was widely applicable in production companies accepted in more than 90 countries. Some countries that have embraced this initiative among many others included Australia, Greece, Mauritius, and Hong Kong. The service industry has begun understanding and seeing the relevance of becoming certified under the ISO 9000 norms.

Within the service industry, tourism for instance, was becoming a key tool in modern management. In a recent study conducted by Djofack (2017) in the Spanish tourism industry points that ISO 9001 certified companies apply this procedure more for internal purposes such as improving service or product processes for better output and results. This study was approached using a survey questionnaire in 120 Spanish tourism enterprises and the validity and reliability tested using confirmatory factor analysis. Furthermore, to understand the effects of ISO certification within these companies using statistics, the logit model was applied. In conclusion, the relevance according to this study showed that implementing ISO 9000 standards in a tourism company was very helpful, delivering on its findings in an industry that was guided by high competition.

According to Mak (2011:118), when an organisation was ISO 9000 certified, several benefits accrue following its compliance. These benefits fall under the following categorisation of operations, marketing, finance, and human resource. Pursuing a well-organised existing operational system was advantageous to any organisation and helps to reduce running costs as procedures are well-defined and strictly followed to obtain better results. A good example could be standardised operations manual for hospitality and tourism service providers. According to Mak (2011), being accredited by ISO 9000 enables the TO to have a mastery of the company's operational processes and improve managerial control of the complex structure of tour operations. The TOs in Mak's (2011) study agreed that with the ISO 9000 they are geared towards being more proactive rather than reactive. Among the marketing advantages are global recognition, provision of quality goods and services, high customer satisfaction level and competitive edge over competitors (Mak 2011:118). By implementing the ISO 9000, a TO becomes more innovative in its promotional fares and advertising. Having the logo of the ISO in one's advertisements was a big boost and gave us competitive edge over others (Mak, 2011).

The financial benefits of ISO 9000 are very significant and included reduction in costs, better profit margin and more efficient workflow. Finally, human resources included a much more committed staff and employees who value quality, lesser employee turnover and better training for employees. A lukewarm receptive attitude could be a deterring factor to a TO. Therefore, the behaviour of staff in a TO was key in assuring the delivery of quality service. This starts with a quality assurance training for all staff ensuring that the company's goals and objectives are aligned with the staff training needs. Having a staff that was motivated provided that enabling environment for service quality offering to thrive. Another benefit from ISO 9000 certification was that of service benefit. Certified TO quality control could be achievable via the customer service department with the implementation of customer feedback surveys, reports from tour guides and complaints handling.

Even though obtaining ISO 9000 was identified as best practice, some vices were recorded. For instance, the long processing time and very expensive nature of the registration and certification were among the major setbacks (Mak, 2011:119). Therefore, organisations with small budgets would rather find it difficult to opt for ISO 9000 certification. Equally, there was much paperwork involved as well as administrative procedures. According to Mak (2011:119), the certification was more on the compliance requirements rather than ensuring good service quality. Because of all these, there seems to be some kind of lack of commitment on behalf of management to get certified, little training resources as well as little interest to want to understand and know about an organisation getting ISO certified (Alan, 2005:200).

There was little research on the impact of ISO 9000 in tourism. The study by Mak (2011:118) showed that whether ISO 9000 certified or not does not bring about a necessary improvement in quality as well as operations rather the certification process enables organisations to stay focused towards achieving better service quality. This assertion was proven true in other related studies, for example, Mueller and Abecassis-Moedas (2017:250). Within the tourism domain, applying the ISO 9000 standards within the organisation's vision and culture would be beneficial towards building and eventually attaining service quality through standard operating procedures. These procedures would be made known to both the manager and employee for better understanding and therefore place them on the same level as concerns providing efficient service quality to the customer no matter their changing needs. This suggests the issue of risks.

2.13.2 Risk management

Risk management was a very important issue that should be addressed by organisations that wish to maintain their clientele base. An eventual high-risk issue was the failure to satisfy the customer. This happens both in ISO 9000 certified or non-ISO 9000 certified organisations as customer needs are different and always changing. As discussed in this chapter, the service quality perceptions of the service provider (manager and staff) and the customer are different. Considering the high competition in the market and the demanding nature of customers with unique and different needs makes it challenging for the TO company to always perform highly. According to Chiarini (2017:310), another risk could be if the TO would be able to meet up with the compliance requirements for ISO; for instance, having well trained employees and the non-presence of risk-based evaluation.

Within the tourism industry, the perceived risk could be a huge problem. This was because of the service characteristic of inseparability. Tourism organisations such as TOs must understand the risks and carry out when necessary risk assessment to measure the amount of risk involved in the process. Therefore, it could be concluded that a risk-based approach in their service quality assessment could be a good position towards ensuring better service quality (Musikavanhu, 2017:75). A move by the TO starting from the ISO 9000 certification was good but a move towards TQM was better. According to Mak (2011), ISO certified TOs become benchmarks to their competitors, had better service quality images as well as a better operational procedural system that should aid curb service failure. The next improvement strategy to be discussed was service recovery.

2.13.3 Recovering from service failure

Service provision was a human-to-human interaction involving a service encounter occurring between the different actors. The one providing the service has the duty and responsibility of giving their best service quality all through the process (Kotler et al., 2014:47). With the human weakness originating from the service characteristic of heterogeneity and inseparability discussed earlier in this chapter, it was inevitable to not encounter problems with either the customer or the service provider. From whichever angle the problem may arise, a consensus must be reached between the two for the transaction to pull through successfully to the end. Service providers should ensure customers are satisfied even if it was during the recovery process (Kotler et al., 2014:38).

Service recovery was said to be an integral part of service quality because of its benefits. Several benefits of service recovery existed among which were transforming a dissatisfied customer to a satisfied customer; better sales; increased customer loyalty; positive word of mouth; improved competitive edge; and value addition to the company (Kotler et al., 2014:47; Piaralal, Bhatti & Juhari, 2016:898). According to Piaralal et al. (2016:900), one of the main advantages from service recovery were the lessons learnt and applied to bring about excellent service quality. In the TO industry, the organisations that were conscious of the fact that service failure was part and parcel of the service package and had a recovery strategy to effectively counter these failures once they occurred stood out among their peers. Grönroos (1988:130) asserted that service recovery was the process of bringing back dissatisfied customers to the original objective state of satisfied customers because of a failed service from the service provider.

Hudson et al. (2004) defined service recovery as the process whereby an organisation sought to correct a failed service delivery. According to Grönroos (1988:130), the process of recovery had to occur immediately following the failed service delivery. This helped to regain customer trust and give customers a sense of fairness in the recovery system (Wang, Hsu & Chin, 2014:318). He acknowledged that problems in the tourism industry linked to service failure were unexpected and overpowering. For instance, during the execution of a tour package, customers adopted different attitudes towards certain activities within the tour that caused discordance. Hence, the wrong perception started to build up in the mind of the customer. Equally, on the side of the TO, it was the staff that had not gotten a full understanding after a training course on what and how they were supposed to act. As a result, they provided the wrong service to the customer. Perhaps, the secret to winning this fight was to be proactive and to always anticipate a problem before if occurred. Providing some extra value service not requested by the customer gives much satisfaction. But how does this happen?

Training a TO's employees through case studies which are often real-life scenarios could boost their morale to assume temporary positions of responsibility. Also, through complaint letters from customers, the employees are asked the question what you would do to solve the problem. Doing such exercises triggers the mind of the employees to think out of the box concerning what added value they can bring in and it also develops their critical thinking skills. Therefore, a TO having an open-door complaints policy was a positive step towards ensuring excellent service quality. Employee empowerment was another tool to have good results from handling the complaints of customers. According to Kotler et al. (2014:47), this empowerment was about delegating authority to decide, taking responsibility of one's actions and providing some kind of incentive to the customer. Hence, the front office (first customer touch point) employees efficiently attend to customers having in mind how to pre-empt any misunderstanding. However, one must be cautious of the fact that though empowering the employee was good, it must be kept with a certain limitation of decision making, especially concerning service recovery. This serves as a control mechanism by management as well as a means of talent detection for the future of the service provider.

Though tourism was a significant industry in job creation, it was also a significant source of customer complaints. Despite the recent evolution in research, so far there was little research conducted that focuses on service recovery. In the TO, Schoefer and Ennew (2004) analysed the customer evaluation of TO's replies to their complaints. Their findings showed that even though a company recovered from its service failure, the level of customer satisfaction was uncertain. In other fields like in the hospitality industry, Lewis and McCann (2004) conducted a study on service failure and recovery in the UK hotel industry. According to their findings, the guests that showed satisfaction from the responses from the hotel following guests' complaints were more likely to return than those not satisfied.

In their study on the effect of service failures and recovery on the critical incidents of a hotel, Leong, Kim and Ham (2002) reveal that issues that were totally solved brought about repeat patronage meanwhile incomplete or not resolved service failures deterred guests' return patronage. Looking at the restaurant, Hoffman, Kelley and Rotalsky (1995) studied service failures and their means of recovery realised that ample care given to resolving a service failure that met the customer's expectation influenced customer loyalty. In the airline, Migacz, Zou and Petrick (2017) concluded that the most effective way to service recovery was for the airline management to compensate passengers beyond their expectations. With research conducted in these different fields within the tourism business chain, more studies need to be conducted on how service recovery would bring about repeat purchase (Wang et al., 2014:318). This leads in the direction of TO managers to conduct market research so as to reposition themselves in the market. The next sub-section would present the next strategy of market research.

2.13.4 Market research for service quality

For a TO to be proactive and stay ahead of its competitors through the provision of excellent service quality, it was necessary to conduct market research aimed at getting relevant information concerning meeting the customer needs linked to service quality expectations. Market research as defined by Kotler et al. (2014:37) as a "process that ascertains and outlines marketing opportunities and problems with the intention to provide solutions and achieving success". Findings are then communicated to management. This measure serves as a recovery and a preventive tool to avoid service failure as one finally understands the customer perception, expectations, and feedback. The market research philosophy originated from the marketing concept (Brassington and Petit, 2013:13) and was adopted most at times by enterprises in the hospitality industry (Kotler et al., 2014:17). Market research was an organised procedure that encourages organisations to meet and/or even exceed the expectations of the customer by providing a customised service within the framework of the organisational goals.

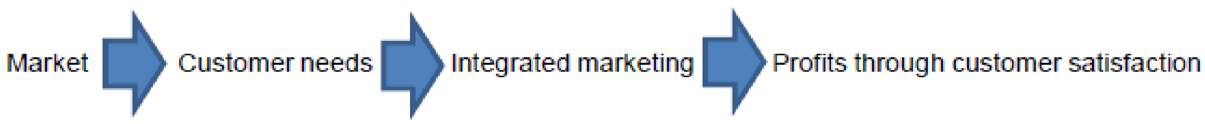


Figure 19: Marketing Concept
Source : Kotler et al. (2014:17)

The marketing concept shown in Figure 19 was developed by Kotler et al. (2014:17). It is simple and could be clearly understood as the organisation identifies and defines its target market in the first instance. All the marketing activities of the organisation are then combined towards winning the attention of the targeted customers and creating some kind of lasting relationship that creates customer value and customer satisfaction (Kotler et al., 2014:17). The final outcome on the side of the organisation was the existence of a service-oriented culture (as discussed in chapter 2.4) which already suggests the level of service quality consciousness among the employees and managers towards satisfying the customer needs. With the adoption of a marketing research attitude, this horizontal platform relationship enables all strata of the organisational hierarchy to be in harmony, which aids decision making that positively affects the organisational processes and minimise procedural errors from other departments to the maximum. This was proven via past research.

Previous studies have specified that there was an extant connection between service quality and market research (Ramayah, Samat & Lo 2011:9; Pantouvakis, 2014). According to Pantouvakis (2014:106), there was a very strong and positive rapport between an oriented market research and measures of effectiveness such as service quality. Such an orientation helps the one providing the service to come out with a service and even marketing mix that satisfies and supersedes the customer expectations as customers view such services as of superior quality. Moreover, organisations that have adopted such an approach have a positive corporate image one of always providing excellent service quality (Pantouvakis, 2014:106).

In another study by Chang et al. (1999:416), the benefits resulting from a marketing research orientation organisation are similar to those obtained by organisations that provide excellent service quality. Some of these benefits included improved service or product quality, cost effectiveness, improved sales and profit margin, encouraging customer feedback, better performance (Chang et al., 1999:416), and of course understanding the customer perception and expectation.

TOs just like other hospitality organisations are encouraged to adopt a market research philosophy to improve on their service quality provision. The process of marketing research must be made part and parcel of the organisation’s goals through its integration within the organisational procedures as a way of understanding the customer perception and expectation to be able to better evaluate the service offering. To effectively measure service quality, accurate data must constantly and continually be collected and conducted via market research (Voon, 2006:613). The data definitely assists in making the right decision by management on the correct type of service to be provided at what time thereby enhancing better service quality (Pantouvakis, 2014:13). Equally, in conducting market research, the TO organisation gets a better understanding of the market trend, customer perception and expectation as well changing customer behaviour which help the organisation to adjust accordingly (Voon, 2006:613). In the process of market research, the customers are segmented, and their needs are better known and handled.

With all these reasons advanced, it was therefore recommended for TOs or service organisations to adopt such a market research concept to always ensure its service quality provision is top and well maximised to bring about satisfied customers feedback as well as more profit to the business. Having discussed these enhancement strategies for a better service quality, chapter three will elaborate on the theme of the customer experience of a service during service provision and how true satisfaction was achieved.

2.14 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the concept of service quality, examined the existing assessment models found in literature and using the information as a foundation on which to develop the conceptual framework. Basic definitions of the concept of service quality from different authors were discussed. The history and evolution of the concept of service quality and its evaluation, first developed by Grönroos (1984) and applied by Parasuraman et al. (1985) was presented next. Not left out was a presentation of the service concept as was first used by Sasser et al. (1978) to explain the elements that ought to be sold to a customer (Paulišić et al., 2016:235). The next item for discussion was the service culture which stressed on the fact that within the tourism industry having a service culture was a precondition for an organisation’s excellence and business efficiency. It was also important to discuss the human interactions that occurred in a service encounter. Following was the service quality characterisation which basically included perishability, heterogeneity, intangibility, inseparability (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Kotler and Keller, 2009; Ganesh and Haslinda, 2014:1190), and ownership (Evans, 2015:685). The determinant factors of service quality and its dimensions suggested by different researchers such as Berry et al. (1985) and Johnston and Silvestro (1990) were presented in section 2.8. There was equally a broad investigation on service quality conceptualisation from the Rust and Oliver model (1994); dynamic process service quality model to the very well-known SERVQUAL model which in this study was considered as the model from which the suggested evaluation framework was developed. The service quality measurement item scales for tourism companies like TOs were discussed in section 2.10. Relevant service quality models cited in tourism literature were discussed in section 2.11. These models stemmed from modifications of the SERVQUAL model depending on the industry being researched. It was in that same line of thought that this study was being conducted. Lastly, service quality was improved through the implementation of several policies and practices as was discussed in section 2.13. The next chapter would delve on importance of customer experience and satisfaction vis-à-vis service quality.

CHAPTER THREE

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND SATISFACTION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of customer experience revolving around psychology had now taken centre stage in most marketing literature. It was a sensation and/or perception in one's mind that left embedded traces of memory after an encounter that could had a long-lasting effect on one's purchase habits and relations. Customer experience was important as it helped one to understand the customer's significance in an interaction that would have led to better service quality delivery. This chapter's expounding kicked- off with a clear picture provision of what really was the customer experience, its concept, beginning with what authors had defined it was to be and understood the difference from service quality. This chapter would address particularly the secondary objective:

II. To determine the influence of customer experience on service quality in the ITO industry.

The conceptual models in customer experience were discussed later. Of course, there were some distinct features of customer experience from customer satisfaction. This distinction was discussed in the next section. In contemporary times in marketing, focus had moved from service quality to customer experience. More of this focal change was examined in the last section of this chapter. The next paragraph would discuss what researchers had said on customer experience.

3.2 CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE DEFINITIONS, CONCEPT AND FOUNDATION

Several studies on the concept of customer experience were conducted as seen in existing literature. Different approaches by different authors were used to define this theory. Watkinson (2013:15) asserted that the "customer experience was the qualitative feature of any interaction that an individual had with a business, its products or services, at any point in time." According to Löytänä and Kortesu's (2011:11) definition, it was the complete consideration of all the customers' aims and objectives realised from the operations of an organisation. Arussy (2010:5) defined customer experience from the angle of profitability and showed how innovations made individuals committed to the good cause of customer experience.

Meyer and Schwager's (2007) defined customer experience as involving every element of the company's offering ranging from marketing, packaging, quality of customer care and service features. They explained that such an interaction was either direct or indirect. In the former case, it was the customer that started the process via purchasing. In the latter case, it was through advertisements, news and promos that happened during the purchase process not programmed. Verhoef, Lemon, Parasuraman et al. (2009) concurred with this definition, as they added that customer experience was all-inclusive as well as encapsulates the complete customer experience through the pre, during as well as post selling stages which happened through various channels.

Shaw, Dibeehi and Walden (2010) equally added that experience was measured with regards to the customer's expectations all through these contact touch points. Borowski (2015) mentioned that it was proven that though strong customer experience produced significant findings, many companies were still unable to identify effective strategies to achieve these results. Gentile, Spiller and Noci (2007:395) defined customer experience in an all-inclusive way in which they said: The customer experience originated from a set of interactions between a customer and a product, a company, or part of its organisation, which provoked a reaction. This experience was strictly personal and implied the customer's involvement at different levels (rational, emotional, sensorial, physical, and spiritual.

The common point in all these definitions was that of customer-supplier communication which happened during the encounter. That was summing up of the interpretation of all the encounters a customer had. The concept of customer experience relied on the complete encounters all through the different phases spanning from advertising, purchase, usage, until cancellations.

Table 3: Some researcher's works in customer experience literature

Time	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
Service quality and experience measurement	Parasuraman et al.; Zeithaml				Zarantonello et al.; Brakus et al.	Lemke et al.; Klaus and Maklan
General customer and service experience and link to profit		Heskett et al.	Pine and Gilmore	Berry et al.; Schmitt; Carù and Cova; Shaw	Berry and Carbone; Frow and Payne; Gentile et al.; Meyer and Schwager; Grewal et al.	Shaw et al. ; Nasution et al.
Organizational design for customer experience				Blanchard et al.; Galbraith	Mosley; Harris	
Experience design					Voss and Zomerdijk; Patrício et al.	Zomerdijk and Voss; Patrício et al
Customer Experience Management					Worldwide; Rae; Fisk; Verhoef et al.	Kamaladevi; Palmer; Johnston and Kong; Burns; Clatworthy; Manning and Bodine; Mummigatti; Leather; Newbery and Farnham; Walker

Source : Du Plessis and De Vries (2016 :27)

Studies on customer experience were important and relevant in literature as it was ongoing since the 20th century. Table 3 shows the evolution of customer experience studies over a two-and-a-half-decade period by different authors. It also indicated the relationship between customer experience and service quality as well as management design issues.

The concept of customer experience in the past used to be associated only to certain organisations just like how experiences were associated only to services (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). Recently, experience had moved beyond into other areas like tourism and theme parks. According to Pine and Gilmore (1998), because of the absence of functional differentiation, products and services were used more interchangeably and led to greater competition. They went further to state that in addition to commodities, goods and services, experience had now become the fourth important economic point when it came to customers' growing demands for something memorable.

Among the early writers of customer experience were Pine and Gilmore (1998). They discussed issues of experiences within service companies that are now a key to obtaining competitive edge. According to Meyer and Schwager (2007), customers reacted in a subjective manner when in exchange with an organisation providing a service. Simply put, it was the total sum of the customer's complete answers to what a company was offering all through the purchase journey/process. The study identified direct (happenings without the customer's control) and indirect contacts (customer's intention was to purchase). Since customer experience involves both direct and indirect contacts, according to Verhoef et al. (2009), the whole empirical exchanges that happened before, during and after sales constitute the customer experience.

The customer experience topic that was emergent was not understood as a separate theory within the marketing literature (Verhoef et al., 2009). Though in the past, research paid more attention to service quality and customer satisfaction literature, experience never went unnoticed. Holbrook and Hirchmann (1982) realised that consumption had some empirical issues and stated future research was be geared more towards the consumption experience.

Pine and Gilmore (1998) discussed the experience economy and introduced the general idea of value progression economically. The theory postulates that when a customer was offered a service tailored to meet his/her needs, there was higher value created. Therefore, the goods were customised to become services which was intentionally customised to become experiences. To gain competitive advantage, companies were forced to pay attention and apply this fourth economic offering to create greater value (Pine and Gilmore 1998). In further research by Pine and Gilmore (2000), there was a fifth distinct offering on the progression chart named "transformation" which was still an unexploited theory.

3.3 THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE FOUNDATION

According to Carbone and Haeckel (1994), the substance of customer experience had its roots from the social sciences. Maslow (1964) saw a different experience angle from the view point of sociology and psychology which he called the "peak experience". It was a scenario when someone was moved from ordinary reality to perceiving ultimate reality. It often lasted for a short time and produced positive affective results. According to Thorne (1963:248), peak experience was said to be that magical point in the life of a customer full of excitement, as well as having memorable experiences. From an ethnological and anthropological point of view, Carù and Cova (2003) explain that the customer experience came about when someone perceives events through their consciousness, a process influenced by one's culture.

In the last 30 years, the significant topic of customer experience was researched within the marketing domain as well as the social sciences (Chen & Chen 2011). It was closely linked to management, behavioural economics as well as psychological research and is of high and significant importance looking at it from a service dominant theoretical eye (Olsson et al. 2012). Previous studies have dwelled on the customer experience's authentic nature (Chhabra, Healy & Sills, 2003; Cohen, 1988; McCabe, 2002; Taylor, 2001; Uriely, 2005) though it was somehow limited in the customer experience definitions and attributes (Cohen 1979; Lee and Crompton, 1992). Some authors approached the topic of customer experience from different perspectives. For example, Hirsch (1972) understood the topic from the side of culture. In contrast, Kaplan (1987) approached the topic in an aesthetic way (Walls et al., 2011). The next paragraphs will highlight the perspectives of building on a positive customer experience.

According to Shaw and Hamilton (2016:8), customer experience comprises various rudiments and perspectives such as physical, emotional, subconscious, rational, and psychological. Trust stems from the theory of the "bank of appreciation" (Soudagar, Iyer & Hildrebrand, 2012:15), meanwhile positive customer experience stems from the joint outcome of three actions: moments of truth, word of mouth and the media, and direct customer interaction (Heimonen, 2017:12). There were four important basics that formed a positive customer experience which brought about trust, namely, responsiveness, reliability, relevance, and convenience (see Table 4).

Table 4: Four important basics for positive customer experience

Basic elements	**Description**
Responsiveness	Listen and quickly responding
Reliability	Fulfilling on your promise
Relevance	Personalised and meaningful offerings
Convenience	Choice offering, consistency, and respect for time.

Source: Soudagar, Iyer and Hildrebrand (2012:18)

The four basic elements of a positive customer experience were obtained from a survey conducted by the Bloomberg Business Week Research Services (BBRS) where 307 participants responded and identified these points (Soudagar et al., 2012:18-19). The most relevant outcome was the item reliability. It referred to the respect of delivery time of a service. Convenience represented the ease with which service transactions and interactions happened between the organization and the customer through several channels. Responsiveness was about the actions taken by the service provider from the customers' feedback.

Psychology remains among the most important perspectives of a positive customer experience. According to Löytänä and Kortesuo (2011:43) and Shaw and Hamilton (2016:8), positive customer experience comprises four psychological perspectives which resulted in creating emotions. The various features of the psychological perspective were the identity and self-image of the customer, surprises which created strong experiences, memorable experiences, and the customer wanted more of such experiences.

Another approach to customer experience definitions was based on the affective and cognitive theories (Rose, Clark, Samouel & Hair 2012) to describe the occurrence of experience. According to Chang and Horng (2010) and Berry et al. (2002), service providers satisfied the customer needs and provided some degree of desired experience. Berry et al. (2002) had equally acknowledged the emotions and functional features as service experience elements.

Customer experience was bound by time (Bitran et al., 2008) with different phases identified. Furthermore, customer experience always begins with service provider and service receiver having contact. This happened physically through word-of-mouth communication or through other marketing strategy awareness techniques provided by the service provider. Next was the service exchange phase was prejudiced by external factors like the employees, physical environment or even the customers (Wu & Liang, 2009). It could be likened to a theatrical stage in which the customers are considered as those watching, the environment was the platform, the service providers were the characters and the service was the play (Grove et al., 1997).

Pine and Gilmore (1998) introduced a new theoretical concept to customer experience called "the experience economy". It was applied to bring about an overall increase in the performance of service organisations (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; 2002). The framework of experience economy was applied to explain and understand the concept of customer experience in the tourism industry (Oh et al., 2007; Richards, 2001). Looking at the theory from the business perspective, customer experience could be seen and understood as "events that engage individuals in a personalised way" (Pine & Gilmore, 1999:12). Basing their idea on this framework, the authors went further and stated that customer experience was "enjoyable, engaging, memorable encounters for those consuming these events" (Oh et al., 2007:120).

Judging by the experience economy model, four dimensions of customer experiences exist: entertainment, escapist, educational, and aesthetics dimensions (Hosany & Witham, 2010). Founded on two very important dimensions: the participatory level and the immersion/absorption level was the experience economy. The definition of immersion could be "becoming physically (or virtually) a part of the experience itself" and absorption could be said to be "occupying a person's attention by bringing the experience into the mind" (Pine & Gilmore, 1999:31). The participatory dimension was such that it differs among the passive and the active meanwhile the realm of immersion differs between being immersed completely to fully absorbed.

Oh et al. (2007) argue that focusing on the customer participation dimension, passive customers could have aesthetic and entertainment experiences while customers with active participation could have educational or escapist experiences. Customers with passive participation bring no contribution to the service performance while active participation of customers could personally impact the service and cause a change in the customer experience. According to the immersion-absorption dimension, the entertainment experience and educational experience was engulfed by the customers while simultaneously the escapist experience and the aesthetics experience could be said to be immersive.

Among the new customer experience theories was the conception of experiential states of cognition and affection (Rose et al., 2012). According to Gentile et al. (2007:398), the experiential state of cognition was said to be that element in a customer's experience that was "connected with thinking or conscious mental processes." Here, everything happened in the mind of the customer and understood all issues related to service experience. This state requires participation and full immersion as customers completely commit in an all exchange process to make up the customer experience. According to Gentile et al. (2007:398), the affective experiential state "involved one's affective system through the generation of moods, feelings and emotions".

According to Rose et al. (2012), emotional replies was stimulated through service settings that could trigger in customers a sentimental relationship. The experience was very much appreciated when consumed by customers in the experiential state of affection and appeals to their judgement (Oh et al., 2007). Some examples of affective experiential state included playing sports, listening to music, going sightseeing or even reading. Additionally, in the experiential state of affection, the full attention and readiness of the customer was required. This state was branded through observation as well as delight of organisations providing services and customers.

Customer experience was a very significant topic in research as well as in the community of professional managers and was the very next focus when it came to obtain competitive edge in the experience marketing service industry. Over time, various perspectives such as the psychological standpoint, theories such as cognitive and affective theories and even developed frameworks like the experience economy was exploited in service customer literature. The next subsection dwelled on discussions about customer experience within the sphere of tourism and hospitality study.

3.4 TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Customer experience was highly rated concept with many studies which was conducted in tourism. In a 2014 survey by Gartner, 89% of service enterprises compete based on the customer experience foundation. In 2016, the Marketing Science Institute (MSI) stated that though customer experience was an emerging field of study, it had taken the “Tier 1 research priority” spot (MSI 2016) and had taken key interest in academic research (Jaakkola, Helkkula & Aarikka-Stenroos, 2015) with previous studies conducted since the 1960s. For instance, Boorstin (1961) attempted to determine the formation of customer experience in tourism. He described customer experience as “trivial, superficial, frivolous pursuit of vicarious, contrived experiences, a ‘pseudo-event” (Boorstin, 1961:77).

The relevance of the authenticity of the customer experience was conducted by MacCannell (1973). He believed to pursue the authentic experience was very important for the customer’s pleasure. According to Cohen (1979), no past theories were binding and could be used in all scenarios but that each could be specifically applied in a particular type of customer experience. Viewing from Cohen’s (1979) critical tourism eye, he distinguished different types of experiences separated into existential, experimental, experiential, and recreational diversionary groups.

According to Knutson and Beck (2003), new modern angles of customer experience in tourism and hospitality view experience with regards to quality service, expectations, perceptions, value as well as satisfaction. Quan and Wang (2004) conducted a study aimed at studying the changing features of experiences within the hospitality domain while analysing the day-to-day running process of experiences. At the end of their research, they created an index for customer experience. According to Knutson et al. (2009), its main structuration was to examine the different issues in customer experience while complementing the existing index of the American customer satisfaction.

According to Hosany, Zeglat and Odeh (2016:2), Pine and Gilmore (1998) stated that they were four wide categories of customer experiences placed at two stages.

I. Customer involvement level which brought about active and passive participation.
II. Commitment or engagement of a customer translated either as absorption or immersion respectively.

The different dimensions of customer experiences included:

I. Entertainment: This took the passive/absorption form. It was among the oldest forms of customer experience and involves a passive participation in an activity for relaxation or leisure.
II. Educational: This took the active/absorption form. It involved active engagement of the customer's mind. It intrigues and appeals to one's wish to want to learn something new.
III. Aesthetics: This took the passive/immersion form. This was about how the customer translated his/her physical environment.
IV. Escapist: This took the active/immersion form. It was the level at which a customer was so immersed into an activity.

Existing literature concerning customer experience in tourism and hospitality could be categorised into three different main streams (Walls et al., 2011) namely: the nomenclature of experiences and how it was classified; the roots of experience and what caused them; and the existing link among different concepts of customer behaviour and experience. Thorne (1963) was among the early creators of the classification of hospitality experience. The classification of experiences could be said to be several, for instance, full of emotion, perceptive, conative, sensual, self-actualisation and highpoint experiences. Some previous research in hospitality studies on the topic of customer experience tried providing evidence of the formation of experience as well as what factors promote an optimistic experience growth level by the customer (Cole & Chancellor, 2009). Nevertheless, according to Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Formica and O'Leary (2006), there was a gap in research on how to measure experiences in tourism.

In addressing this gap, Oh, Fiore and Jeoung (2007:128) conducted an empirical study and the model developed by Pine and Gilmore's (1998) was tested. This study considered the experiences of the customers at a hotel facility. Oh et al. (2007:128) established a four-dimensional measurement scale following sound methodological approach that captured the tourism experiences. According to Oh et al. (2007:129), the scale used to conduct the assessment was reliable, valid and likely to be stable across different service areas. Furthermore, they called for more research to be conducted replicating their framework in other tourism setups as well as determine the relationship between customer experiences dimensions and evaluations after consuming an experience. According to Forrester (2014), initiatives of customer experience fail as very few companies attain the maturity stage of customer experience.

Some researchers have attempted expounding on the different kinds of experiences together with how they relate with the different concepts. For instance, Geissler and Rucks (2011) conducted a study on the significance of theme park experiences. Barsky and Nash (2002) in another study surveyed the emotional relationship versus stay-at-hotel relationship experience. The findings proved that in the responses from the different areas and product names in the industry, there were emotional variations. Poulsson and Sudhir (2004) acknowledge that for the customer experience to make sense, it must have features of learning, novelty, engagement, and surprise.

The management of customer experiences in the TO was complex and challenging. This was because the set up comprised many areas such as food and beverage, hotel, entertainment, design of the facility, exchanges between staff and customers but also support features like website, information technology usage online and offline (Jay, TingTing & Elina, 2018:3). Jay et al. (2018:4) conducted a study to understand the mechanisms to manage the experiences of customers in tourism through a far-reaching literature review considering comments from other researchers and industry practitioners. Their findings revealed that through collaboration and co-creation of the marketing, operations, human resource, designs and strategy together with ICT and social media, a holistic model was developed to bring about and manage customer experiences. The next sub-section presented the extant customer experience empirical models in literature.

3.5 CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE CONCEPTUAL MODELS AND DIMENSIONS

As a result of the deficiency in customer experience, some researchers had established frameworks to provide clarity and improve the understanding of customers to management (Klaus & Maklan, 2012). Some scholars used SERVQUAL as a guide to customer experience analysis. Though SERVQUAL proved its universal applicability as valid and reliable across different service industries (Klaus & Maklan, 2012), this method was found wanting as it failed to totally unravel the complex nature of customer experience (Ladhari, 2009). Based on existing literature on customer experience, Havir (2017:82) conducted an analytical study that explored and compared the dimensions of customer experience from 17 projects conducted since 2010. From their study, a framework that had the most mentions and cross-references in the field of customer experience was chosen. The next paragraphs explained the seven models in customer experience. This subsection ended with a summary table with the different frameworks of the experience of customer dimensions (Table 5).

I. **Customer Experience Model**

Developed by Gentile et al. (2007), this model which relied on previous literature considered six customer experience dimensions. The first dimension was sensory whose objective was to obtain a good sensorial understanding via the five senses: hearing, seeing, smell, taste, and touch. The second was emotional. It was based on moods and feelings to create a relationship with the organisation, or product. The third one was the cognitive dimension which involved the customer’s thought and mental processes. Next was the pragmatical dimension which was related to the concept of usability or doing something practically. Through the dimension of lifestyle, the customer’s product consumption and usage were integrated with the organisation’s shared values and beliefs. The relational dimension was obtained from the social interaction between the customer and other people. Through this viewpoint, the organisation boosted its customers to create fun communities or develop a deep community spirit (Havir, 2017:85).

II. **Conceptual Model of Customer Experience**

This model was developed by Verhoef et al. (2009). The dimensions included socio-environmental factor based on customer-to-customer relations; service interface which was very much similar to social environment but for the fact that interaction was between the customers and employees; the retail atmosphere dimension focuses on interior décor colours, room arrangements or even music; the assortment dimension indicates the capability of the organisation to provide unique products of best quality; price involved all incentives the organisation provides such as loyalty programs and personalized promotions. The sixth was that of alternative channels of customer experiences. Retail branding was the last dimension. The final outcome of the experience was that provided by both brands. (Havir, 2017:86).

III. **eTailQ Experience Model**

Owing to the rise in e-commerce, Wolfinbarger and Gilly (2003) advanced a four-dimensional scale to assess customer experience within an online environment. The first was the design of the website. This involved considering every feature of the online platform that may impact the experience of the customer; for instance, search for information, style of navigation. The second was the reliability dimension which assessed how accurate the explained product on the online platform was. Also, product delivery time was essential and crucial. The next dimension was that of customer service, which was supposed to be fast, responsive, and helpful. The last dimension was security. This comprises secure payments online and privacy of all information shared (Havir, 2017:85).

IV. **E-S-QUAL Model**

Parasuraman et al. (2005) adapted the SERVQUAL framework owing to the uprising of ecommerce that brought about the four-dimensional E-S-QUAL model. Efficiency is the first dimension of this model. This included comfort and rapidity to access the website. The second dimension was that of fulfilment which reflects how credible the information provided on the website was. This information was usually about the availability and deadline for delivery and the level to which they are fulfilled. The next dimension was system availability. This involves the technical functionalities of the website. The final dimension was privacy. This assesses the safety of the website from hackers and the way customer's personal information was handled on the website (Havir, 2017:85).

V. **EXQ Framework**

Klaus and Maklan (2012) conceptualised and validated approach for assessing the experience of customer which they called EXQ. They had four main dimensions in their model. Product experience was the first dimension, which advocated that customers wanted the ability and generosity to pick different products and to do a comparison among several offerings. Outcome was the second dimension in the model. It was intended to reduce the customer's cost of transaction. The third dimension was the decisive moment that shows the quality and flexibility of a service an organisation demonstrates when a complication arises. The last dimension was peace of mind. It was an appraisal of the total customer journey (Havir, 2017:86).

VI. **Consumption Experience Model**

In 2006, Fornerino examined the experience of the customer looking at the angle of the participants at an event and the people who watched movies. Five main dimensions were identified. Perceptual dimension was the first dimension that was about the stimulation of the senses. The second dimension was about affective dimension. This was mostly about periods of emotions and excitement and sadness. Behavioural dimension was the third dimension which defines the physical and visual displays stimulated by deep moments. The fourth dimension was social. It was about the level of interaction and communion with each other. The fifth dimension was cognitive which was basically about the thoughts built during the event. (Havir, 2017:85).

VII. **SERVQUAL Model**

The SERVQUAL scale developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) has five dimensions. The first dimension in this model was reliability. It represents giving reliable and accurate services promised to a customer. The second dimension was responsiveness which involves how ready are the customers to be served by the service provider and the attitude of the personnel to handle customer questions and complaints. The third dimension was assurance. This was about building confidence and trust. The fourth one was empathy which assessed the approach of a service provider towards the customer. The fifth dimension was tangibility that represented the physical form of a service.

Table 5: Summary of dimensions in customer experience models

Customer experience model (Gentile et al., 2007)	Conceptual model of customer experience (Verhoef et al., 2009)	eTailQ experience (Wolfinbarger and Gilly, 2003)	E-S-QUAL (Parasuraman et al. 2005)	EXQ framework (Klaus and Maklan, 2012)	Consumption experience model (Fornerino, 2006)	SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al. 1988)
Sensorial	Social environment	Website design	Efficiency	Product experience	Sensorial/ Perceptual	Reliability
Emotional	Service interface	Fulfilment/ Reliability	Fulfilment	Outcome focus	Affective	Responsiveness
Cognitive	Retail atmosphere	Security/ Privacy	System availability	Moments of truth	Physical/ Behavioral	Assurance
Pragmatic	Assortment	Customer service	Privacy	Peace of mind	Social	Empathy
Lifestyle	Price				Cognitive	Tangibility
Relational	Customer experiences in alternative channels					

	Retail brand					

Source: Havir (2017:87)

3.6 CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND SATISFACTION NOT EQUALS

Customer experience and customer satisfaction are uniquely different. Making a customer happy was not exactly the same as providing a good customer experience. According to the business insider article, customer satisfaction formed part of the customer experience which was measured in terms of happiness level. According to a Gesellschaft für Konsumforschung (GFK) 2015 report, contemporary customer experience research commenced at the beginning of customer satisfaction era. The report states that 80% of service companies used customer satisfaction scores to gauge customer experience. Going by the same report, to gain competitive edge over competitors, one must comprehensively rethink the customer experience to a point where it becomes that differentiating factor (Alberto & Rob, 2015).

With regards to definitions of customer experience, there was no authorised definition of experience. However, according to Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), the word “experience” often refers to offerings within a service setting that involves purchase like in the hotel and restaurant settings. From a psychological perspective, scholars have theorised the model of customer experience as having an all-inclusive and personal response coming from the interaction between a customer and the provider of a service (Li, Kim & Wong, 2016).

Berry, Carbone, and Haeckel (2002) proposed in their study that for the sake of healthy competition, the providers of services should endeavour to satisfy and generate some constructive experiences in the customer. Because of growing acknowledgement of the topic practically and conceptually, more was needed for a universal definition globalising all the different views (Klaus & Maklan, 2002). Hence, Meyer and Schwager (2007:118) suggested the following definition: Customer experience was the internal and subjective response customers have with any direct or indirect contact with a company. Direct contact generally occurs during purchase, use and service and was usually initiated by the customer. Indirect contact most often involves unplanned encounters with representatives of a company's products, service or brands and takes the form of word-of-mouth recommendation or criticisms, advertising, news reports, reviews and so forth.

Experience as seen from a mental perspective was something that happened in the mind of people called the "memory of a kind of mental journey" (Sundbo, 2009). A school of thought stated that external factors influenced experiences, expounded through one's state of mind coupled together with past experiences (Jantzen, 2013). The external factors could either be the physical, behavioural, sound, and light or interactive. Of course, all mental sensory organs could bring about experience ending up in building some kind of memory in the brain. Delivering a service and service quality was not even among the phenomena considered to be experience-creating ones. Some researchers understood that experience within the neurosensory framework was a physical-biological phenomenon (Jantzen & Vetner, 2007).

The objective of experiences was about creating something memorable. Experiences are different and varied. For example, some are entertaining, learning, passive or active. Others could be close or happening over at a distance (use of the internet and communication technology). Experiences could be positive or negative. The implication of this was that in a business, sales may not forcibly increase when service was connected to experience. The difference lies at the level of the interpretation which depends on the individual.

Experience was not a new phenomenon. It was in use for some time to explain people's consumption pattern, for instance, cultural and educational studies by Dewey (1929, 1934; 1938). Studies in the production of experience were conducted in academic research using the tourism, culture, and leisure philosophies. In the profit and growth sector of the economy, emphasis was put on the dynamics in experience marketing. As a result, more focus was shifted to the experience economy paradigm. Experience has come onboard owing to its relevance as a social factor to boosting employment and developing the economy. Stressing on the experience economy, the concept was highlighted as a sector for any economy's development. This has gone further to increase the awareness of experience elements as a means to create economic growth areas within the service industry.

Literature from previous studies on customer experiences disclosed several issues of customer experiences. For example, Bitner (1992) presented the terminology of "servicescape" that meant the geography of the place in which the process of service delivery occurs. The terminology “interaction” was applied by Gupta and Vajic (1999) to denote factors affecting customer experiences. Moosberg’s (2007) devised terminology of the “experience room”. It was applied to describe the experience of the customer in a luxury hotel setting following an exploratory study. Equally, Walls et al., (2011) expatiated on the constituents of the customer’s experiences. The study also looked at the concept of customer experiences from several different dimensions which was developed by certain physical elements, including interaction between the employees and fellow customers.

It was generally understood that the customer experience commences with the customer having a need, problem or just a desire and would pay money to get it solved. Whether the customer solves the need or not was their decisive measure of success. The focus of every service provider was to try solving the customer need. From designing to marketing, from operations to management decisions, the goal was on solving the customer’s need or desire better than your competitors. It was proven that the best way to assure customer experience was to build a strong and positive memorable experience and avoiding negative memorable experience. This involves developing a strong service brand attachment to customers so that they always choose your services over other competitors. When thinking of and during the application of customer experience, it was better to consider the bigger picture of customer interactions and not focus on individual interactions (Alberto & Rob, 2015).

In the achievement of customer satisfaction, research has shown that the role of the theory of customer experiences was very significant. The marketing mix understanding, and factor application was very important in activating the customer experiences which occur either during pre-purchase, purchase, or post-purchase phases (Dalla, 2014:116). Among recent researched topics under marketing was the domain of customer satisfaction (Dalla, 2014). Within the literature, one can identify three focus points in the customer satisfaction literature, namely, customer satisfaction concepts, customer satisfaction backgrounds and studies that focus on the customer satisfaction consequences.

The widely applied customer satisfaction definition found in literature identifies the theory of cumulative satisfaction. This was expressed as the global behaviour developed in relation to a service provider by the customer over repeated interactions (Agustin & Singh, 2005). This definition could be understood as a single or multiple item scale. Meanwhile, transactional satisfaction was expressed as customer attitude because of the last interaction or encounter with the service provider. Another well-known definition was that of attribute satisfaction. Here there are many items holding the satisfaction of the customer with regards to the service under study (PerkinsMunn, Aksoy, Keiningham, & Estrin, 2005). These components have several names like “component attitudes” (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999), “attribute satisfaction measures” (Johnson, Garbarino, & Sivadas, 2007), “attribute level performances” (Mittal, Ross, & Baldasare 1998; Anderson & Mittal 2000) or “attribute level ratings of satisfaction” (Perkins-Munn, Aksoy, Keiningham, & Estrin 2005).) Customer satisfaction, according to Homburg and Giering (2001), was a “three-item construct” which consists of product satisfaction, process of sales and service after sales.

According to Hill and Alexander (2016:2), customer satisfaction was defined as “a measure of how your organisation’s total product performs in relation to a set of customer requirements.” Bloemer et al.’s (1995) definition suggests two types of situations. Manifest satisfaction occurs when the customer can compare between performance and expectations while latent satisfaction was the situation in which it was difficult to compare between expectations and performance rather through implicit evaluation they are compared as independent elements.

Though there are several approaches to customer satisfaction in literature, the most famous definitions focus on the customer’s expectations being met. Table 6 presents a summary of customer satisfaction definitions proposed by some well-known scholars based on their approaches.

Table 6: Definitions of Customer Satisfaction

Approach	**Definition**	**Author**
Satisfaction as an outcome	The buyer’s cognitive state of being adequately or inadequately rewarded for the sacrifices he has undergone.	Howard and Sheth (1969)
	An emotional response to the experience provided by (or associated with) particular products or services purchased, retail outlets, or even molar patterns of behaviour, and the overall marketplace	Westbook and Reilly (1983)
	An outcome of purchase and use resulting from the buyer’s comparison of the rewards and the costs of the purchase in relation to the anticipated consequences.	Churchill and Suprenant (1982)
Satisfaction as a	An evaluation rendered that the experience was at	Hunt (1977)

process	least as good as it was supposed to be.	
	An evaluation that the chosen alternative was consistent with prior beliefs with respect to that alternative.	Engel and Blackwell (1982)
	The customer's response to the evaluation of the perceived discrepancy between prior expectations and the actual performance of the product as perceived after this consumption	Tse and Wilton (1988)

Source: Grigoroudis and Siskos (2010:15)

Relevance in customer satisfaction cannot be overemphasised in a market-driven service organisation. Martin et al., (2008) assert that in the service industry, several connected studies to customer satisfaction argue that the application of satisfaction as a cognitive or emotional theory. Researchers contend that the elements of cognition and emotion that form part of satisfaction must be completely considered in customer behaviour modelling in the service industry set up (Wong, 2004). Oliver concurs that the emotional part was relevant and important in understanding the customer's consumption experiences because it co-exists with the cognitive judgement that produces satisfaction. Therefore, some researchers have suggested that in assessing customer satisfaction, additional affective components should be included (Martin et al., 2008).

In this section, it was clearly demarcated that customer experience and customer satisfaction in most marketing literature are related but not the same. However, they were used as an antecedent of the other. The next section shall examine the place of customer experience in previous customer satisfaction studies. Equally, the affiliation between service quality (focus of this study) and customer experience /satisfaction would be examined.

3.7 MAPPING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE WITHIN LITERATURE ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Customer satisfaction has so far reflected the traditional view of marketing by focusing on the functional features, benefits and product characteristics (Dalla Pozza, 2014:115), a view that was criticised by Schmitt (1999) who stressed the significance of customer experience in the process of marketing. According to Pozza (2014:115), though previous marketing literature has called for a focus on customer experiences (Schmitt & Zarantonello 2009; Lemke, Clark,

& Wilson 2011), research has not pointed at the experiential components of customer satisfaction.

Although improving the customer experience was now considered very important and relevant in any service-oriented business (Lemke et al., 2011), conceptualising customer satisfaction has not yet been well understood with regards to customer experiential dimensions. Past literature analysed the relationship between emotion and satisfaction judgements but has ignored other dimensions like senses, behaviour, and relations (Pozza, 2014:116). Emotions could be regarded as a dimension of an overall multidimensional and multifaceted customer experience (Brakus et al., 2009).

Recently, research studies have seen the role of customer experiences take centre stage (Grewal, Levy, & Kumar, 2009). According to Schmitt (1999), studies in marketing should be more centred around the customer. According to him, traditional customer satisfaction comes about by comparing expected product performance with actual performance.

Arnould and Price (1993) and Thompson and Troester (2002) buttressed the need of focusing on customer experiences in the study of services more especially, in customer satisfaction. More precisely, Arnould and Price (1993) demonstrate the major role of customer experience in driving service evaluations meanwhile Schembri and Sandberg (2011) provided in their study insights as to how customers experience service quality in a particular context.

In general terms, it was considered in previous studies that customer satisfaction was linked to customer experience and claimed that experience influences satisfaction (Chen & Chen, 2010; Song et al., 2015). For instance, Geissler and Rucks (2011) observed over a ten-year period the visitor satisfaction at a well-known theme park in the USA. Their study acknowledged important factors that had an influence on the level of total theme park experience during visitor evaluations. Oh et al. (2007) established a scale using the experience economy in a bed and breakfast environment to measure the customer's experience and customer satisfaction. The study concluded that the four experience dimensions could be good predictors of customer satisfaction.

According to Mehmetoglu and Engen (2011), some studies have used the experience dimensions within several other set up and resolute that for example in festivals, aesthetics and escapism are most significant in visitor satisfaction meanwhile in the museum set up, aesthetics and education dimensions are the most important factors. Therefore, it was concluded that customer satisfaction was a complete assessment of the customers' service experience over a certain time frame (Fornell, 1992).

3.8 SHIFT FROM CUSTOMER SERVICE QUALITY TO EXPERIENCE

Some researchers have stated that service management and marketing literature have shifted focus from one of operational quality (Levitt, 1972) to that of customer relations and care (Gummesson, 1994). This interpersonal customer relation was the main characteristic of service deliveries. However, some researchers have argued that the customer must be present at the time of service provision. This was now the basis for a specific service marketing theory which commenced with Eiglier and Langeard (1988) and was developed further by Zeithaml et al. (1990) and those of the Nordic school of thought (Grönroos, 2000). This concept was acclaimed to be widely applied in different business domains presented under various topics like service dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2006). At some point in the discourse, emphasis was laid on service quality stressing the importance of how the customer evaluates the service delivery process.

In all these developments, the topic of experience came to the limelight. Experience within this context was used to imply the customer's thoughts of the functional operations of service quality. Within service management, service research and marketing theories, experience has increased in magnitude and importance as a concept and that has gradually replaced quality in service marketing literature (Sundbo, 2015:107). Experience has come on board based on two scientific backgrounds: marketing and the experience economy.

In marketing literature, the theory of customer experience was long studied in relation to sales and profit making in business (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Meyer & Schwager, 2007). The principal objective of such literature was to offer an understanding of the customer whose decision to purchase was from a functional need-based standpoint. Equally, purchases are made based on the customer experience during the purchase process. It was debated that theoretical experience creates value for the customer which could be more or less a psychological and sometimes sociological phenomenon however different from economic value (Helkkula et al., 2012). Such a view was used severally especially within service marketing or customer relationship management topics (Arnould & Price, 1993; Zomerdijk & Voss, 2010). Experience marketing as was called by some scholars (Schmitt 1999; Smilanski, 2009) was all about using experience to sell services and not just about selling experienced products and services.

The established experience economy (advanced since 1998) was the other paradigm that brought experience literature to the forefront. This perspective focuses on experience as a product in itself (Sundbo, 2015:109). The experience economy has in the last 15 years appeared in literature (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Sundbo & Sørensen, 2013). At first this concept of experience economy focused on marketing generally. Pine and Gilmore (1999) who were said to be the founding fathers of this concept assert that experience concerns both goods and services. In the same line of argumentation with that earlier spoken of within customer relations service marketing literature, they emphasised that it was time for the element of experience to be fully developed as a concept on its own separate from the service concept. Their argument was geared not only towards the psychological or sociological theme but also included the economic theme. To them, services in addition with experience are sold at a much higher price and produce a higher profit.

According to the understanding of some theorists (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Jensen, 1999; Sundbo & Sørensen, 2013), experience was not particularly connected to service (Sundbo, 2015:109). To them, the service concept was not core to the understanding of current economic and marketing issues. This therefore downplays the service dominant logic and gives room for the rise in the experience dominant logic thereby leading to a shift of views and putting experience on the agenda. In addition, according to Sundbo (2015:109), the arguments and analyses from various researchers points that the service industry was the most profitable and rapidly growing industry compared to the manufacturing or primary (agriculture, mining) industry.

Within the service concept, moving from service quality to customer experience has called for a change of focus from the operational features to more interaction between the management/employees and the customers. In this regard, customers are viewed as active members of service co-creation. More research was geared towards understanding the psychological and reactions based on the experiences of customers and their needs. This perspective demonstrates the relevance of experience and customer involvement in service production as the main theme when trying to understand the drive of businesses and value creation for customers.

3.9 RELATING SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

In services marketing literature, the concepts of service quality, measurement and modelling have significant attention. Twenty years ago, research on service quality has received considerable attention from practitioners and academics because of the close interrelationship between service quality and customer satisfaction (Choo, Cheng, & Yeo, 2018; Sam, Hamidu & Daniels, 2018; Ladhari, 2009). Also, the satisfaction construct was the principal reason for the competitive edge in any organisation (Fornell, 1992). Hence, in many companies paying attention to the measure of the level of satisfaction continuously. According to Fornell (1992), companies need to invest significant resources for the improvement of customer satisfaction because it was a gauge of the general health state of an organisation. However, owing to the service characteristics (intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability), it was more difficult to measure service quality than product quality.

In recent times, organisations have realised the far-reaching effects of customer satisfaction as a measure of a successful business. It was understood that it was far less costly to maintain existing customers than to conquer new ones. Hence customer satisfaction had become the key operational goal to many organisations. So, much investment was seen going into areas such as service quality and customer service. Organisations had begun to invest in “database marketing”, “relationship management” and “customer planning” just to have a clear understanding of their customers (Hill & Alexander, 2016:1).

Customer satisfaction was in the mind of the customer and the way the customer saw an organisation’s performed was a perception which sometimes may or may not reflect the real situation. It was known that perceptions develop fast when experienced and are slow to change. In the tourism industry, the customer experience of a destination and the services received would be determinant to whether the customer would recommend that destination to a friend, family member or colleague.

The customer satisfaction response could either be cognitive or affective (Oliver 1993; Yu & Dean, 2001). When a customer had formed pre-consumption expectations by observing a product or its attribute performance and compares with expectations forming perceptions, the perceptions are compared with the expectations on which cognitive satisfaction occurs (Oliver 1993). The cognitive element included equity and attribution. Meanwhile, affective satisfaction was based on post-purchase attributes which included both positive and negative effects on consumption (Yu & Dean, 2001). Affective satisfaction was fair of treatment in the customer perception. Yu & Dean (2001) elucidate that the positive effects on consumption as success whereas the negative effects on consumption are identified as failure. They also stated that these effects have an emotional component (happiness, surprise, and disappointment). Strauss and Neuhaus (1997) realised that in satisfaction research, researchers paid more attention on the cognitive component and little or no attention on the affective component of satisfaction.

It was empirically stated that there was an existing relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. However, in the service quality and customer satisfaction literature, there was some confusion pertaining to the nature of the relationship between the two concepts (Darfoon, 2013). Service quality could be viewed as a general assessment or global value evaluation whereas customer satisfaction could be seen as a transactional assessment (Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Parasuraman et al., 1988, 1994). Based on this distinction, some service quality researchers argue that customer satisfaction assessment was an antecedent of service quality (Bolton & Drew, 1991) while others based on theoretical and empirical studies think that service quality was an antecedent of customer satisfaction and go further to state that higher levels of perceived service quality bring about improved customer satisfaction (Nguya, Kariuki & Muthengi, 2021; Deb & Ahmed, 2018; Rajeswari & Kumari, 2014; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Sulieman, 2011).

Among the researchers, one can find some common ground that service quality and customer satisfaction are related though not in the same way (Choo, Cheng, & Yeo, 2018; Sam, Hamidu & Daniels, 2018; Parasuraman et al., 1985). Furthermore, Parasuraman et al. (1988) and Cronin and Taylor (1992) realised that both service quality and customer satisfaction affect the purchase intentions of a customer even though customer satisfaction has a stronger impact on purchase intentions than service quality (Cronin & Taylor 1992). Kotler and Armstrong (2012) concede that satisfaction was the after-purchase evaluation decision taken after considering expectations.

Though there was some distinction, service quality and customer satisfactions have the same conceptualisation which was the difference between the expectations and the experiences (Baker & Crompton, 2000). Most research studies on service quality and customer satisfaction have applied the disconfirmation paradigm. This paradigm was an approach in which satisfaction resulted from the customer's comparison of their perception of a service performance and the expectations (Oliver & DeSarbo, 1988). The disconfirmation paradigm was used also to examine and measure service quality as the difference between service perception and service expectation.

Customer satisfaction was the outcome that ensued from good quality service felt by those who experienced a service performance that has surpassed their expectation levels. Quality as one of the bases for determining satisfaction and satisfaction has an influence on future quality perceptions (Clemes, 2008). According to Jamal and Anastasiadou (2009), some of the service quality dimensions (tangibility, empathy, and reliability) have a positive relationship with customer satisfaction. According to Suleiman (2011), tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, and assurance have a significant positive relation with customer satisfaction while empathy had a significantly negative effect on customer satisfaction. Nowadays, the paradigm shift was more towards the customer. In the past, quality was designed and determined by the service provider with little or no consideration of the customer or service customer. That happened during the time of mass marketing. Today, customers have greater awareness and choice in the market and are in command. Because of this, there was high competition among service providers on who would get the customers' money.

Looking from an organisation's operational viewpoint, service quality was about meeting and superseding the specifications spelt in the mind of the customer. Hence, customer satisfaction was one's feeling of pleasure or dissatisfaction from comparing the perceived performance with the actual outcome in relation to one's expectations. For this to happen, the organisation must understand the customer's expectations and do it right the first time. It also involves handling customer complaints in a highly efficient and professional manner. Such an ability to deal with problems as it happened was a major point built in the mind of the customer and has a huge impact – about 95% of their ability to re-purchase. It also goes further to stimulate the power of word-of-mouth which has a multiplier effect. For instance, telling ten people about your experience at a destination would ripple down to 100 people getting to know about that destination; therefore, affecting the organisation in one way or another.

In the customer-centric marketing literature, customer service quality was the most influential determinant of customer satisfaction (Grönroos et al., 1996). A better and sound knowledge of the understanding of the customer's perspective of service quality would be a foundational rock for quality improvement in the service industry, more especially in tourism.

The relevance of the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction was expounded in the foregoing discussion and was described summarily as directly proportionate. This means that excellent service quality leads to high customer satisfaction and poor service quality brings about customer dissatisfaction. The next chapter would expatiate on the various approaches and instruments applied to evaluate service and experience service quality.

3.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter discussed extant literature on customer experience. Customer experience was all about the memories a customer has in mind after having exchanged with a service provider. The importance of customer experience lies in trying to understand the role of the customer in an interaction that would lead to better service quality. Discussions started with basic definitions of customer experience as captured by past research studies. This study noticed that the common point in all these definitions was the theme of customer-supplier communication happening during the encounter. Customer experience comprises various rudiments and perspectives such as physical, emotional, subconscious, rational and psychological (Shaw & Hamilton, 2016:8). To be able to form a positive customer experience, there are four important elements that must be present – responsiveness, reliability, relevance, and convenience. In the literature captured in section 3.3, there are four types of customer experience showing the level of interaction between the customer and service provider which included entertainment (passive/absorption); educational (active/absorption); aesthetics (passive/immersion) and escapist (active/immersion). Also discussed were the conceptual models of customer experience such as SERVQUAL, Customer Experience Model, eTailQ Experience Model, E-S-QUAL Model, EXQ Framework (section 3.5). These models presented are very relevant to this study as it helped to achieve this secondary objective – "To determine the influence of customer experience on service quality in the ITO industry." It was understood that it was far less costly to maintain existing customers than to conquer new ones. Therefore, organisations are investing in “database marketing”, “relationship management” and “customer planning” just to have a clear understanding of their customers (Hill & Alexander, 2016:1).

From this chapter, it was concluded that the customer experience commences with the customer having a need, problem or just a desire and would pay money to get it solved. Whether the customer solves the need or not was their decisive measure of success. The focus of every service provider was on attempting to meet customers’ needs. From designing to marketing, from operations to management decisions, the goal was to meet the customers’ needs and requirements better than competitors.

CHAPTER FOUR

SERVICE/EXPERIENCE QUALITY EVALUATION: APPROACHES AND TOOLS FOR ASSESSMENT AND MEASUREMENT

4.1 INTRODUCTION

From past studies on service quality, it was so glaring how relevant and important the topic had become. According to Philip and Hazlett (2011:261), since 1976 there was at least 293 major publications (excluding 1995) where the paradigm of quality service was mentioned. These showed how much interest exists in academic research in trying to advance the topic of quality service evaluation. This chapter shall delve principally on the various tools developed by researchers on the topic of quality service assessment. This chapter would address the following secondary objective

I. To understand service quality and its evaluation models by conducting a literature review.

A theoretical historical background about the assessment of service quality was presented in section 4.2 followed by an examination of the measurement of customer experience in section 4.3. An elaborate discussion on the SERVQUAL model and measurement issues raised in existing literature are presented in sections 4.4 and 4.5 from whose modifications the proposed assessment model for this study would be developed.

4.2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUNDS FOR SERVICE QUALITY EVALUATION

The theoretical background of any study was the framework guide for any research composed of principles, concepts, constructs, and tenants of a theory (Grant & Osanloo, 2014) acting as a blueprint based on the existing theories in that domain of study. Often, such a blueprint was borrowed by the researcher and used in his study to respond to the research problem identified. Some authors such as Fulton and Krainovich-Miller (2010) have stated that the role of the theoretical framework was like that of a map. Hence, Brondizio, Leemans and Solecki (2014) assert that the theoretical frameworks were related theories on areas of human efforts that was valuable to a study. In the next paragraphs, various related theories and constructs surrounding the idea of service quality evaluation was presented and discussed.

The reason behind the significance and relevance of any service quality assessment involves controlling quality while improving the way a customer perceives service quality was a crucial outcome from the whole process of evaluation (Sayareh et al., 2016:204). Service quality evaluation comes into play when the service encounter occurs the moment the customer makes an appraisal and the satisfaction level derived after a set of attitudes have occurred among the service provider and the one consuming or buying the services. In the service encounter, there are five dimensions involved: degree of customisation, participation, physical proximity, time, and engagement. In observing these dimensions, one was trying to develop and maintain an optimal degree of service quality (Pilelienė et al., 2012:103). To evaluate was to take a critical look at something with the objective to provide clarity or more insight. Evaluation was regarded as one obtaining and analysing information via a process in an orderly manner to provide feedback concerning something. Evaluation was often used in a general sense to describe activities such as to monitor, to assess, to audit, to endorse or to accredit (Harvey, 2002:1). According to Harvey (2017:1), quality evaluation was about assessing and judging as acceptable the level of quality. The generic goal for most quality evaluations was to give a general response from different types of audiences while the main goal of any evaluation through an empirical study was to provide useful feedback which was influential in the process of deciding or policy formulation (William, 2006:1).

Several types of evaluations exist depending on the object being evaluated and the reason for the evaluation. Basically, there are two types of evaluations: the formative and the summative. With the formative evaluation, by assessing how to leverage the programme its implementation quality in terms of personnel input, organisational context and procedures was strengthened. Meanwhile with the summative evaluation, the focus was on the consequence of the delivery process of the programme as it examines the effects or outcomes (William, 2006:1).

The positive outcome of an assessment resulted in the following: a loyal customer, conversion of potential customers, motivating positive comments, satisfied, and committed employee, the company's image was boosted, deduction in costing and better output in the business venture (Berry, Bennet & Brown, 1989).

The perceived service quality paradigm in most cases was approached differently, therefore making it understanding a puzzle, for instance; the missed but on-going research attempts to apply a SERVQUAL/SERVPERF scales blend for different industries (e.g., Durvasula, Lysonski & Mehta, 1999) or carry out other studies applying the same theoretical set up (e.g., Mels, Boshoff & Nel, 1997). No wander, Parasuraman et al. (1994), made a call for studies to be successfully addressed, that examines specifically "dimensionality" within the service quality paradigm. For this reason, assessing the perceptions of service quality was among the most researched topics in service marketing. Stressing the importance of the customer’s perception during a service quality assessment gives good reason for one to believe why there was much focus on the topic in previous research (Ladhari, 2008).

Relevant existing literature has shown there are various measurement scales and indexes established and widely applied in academics and industrial practice showing how the service quality was analysed and/or assessed; for instance, SERVQUAL, SERVPERF, SQI, SPI and IPA (Hudson, Hudson & Miller 2004:305). Some well-known service quality measurement models developed and commonly applied in many industries included together with their authors the Nordic model by Grönroos (1984; 2007); SERVQUAL by Parasuraman et al. (1988); SERVPERF by Cronin and Taylor (1992); IPA (Importance-performance analysis) by Martilla and James (1977) and RENTQUAL by Ekiz, Bavik, and Arasli (2009). The Service Quality Scorecard (SQSC) was developed by Swart (2013) as an assessment tool par excellence in the hotel industry to determine variables that influenced service. The next paragraphs shall examine the theoretical background and related service quality evaluation instruments with special focus on the well-known measurement constructs.

Based on studies conducted by Grönroos (1990), Cronin and Taylor (1994) and Parasuraman et al., (1994) there are two main conceptual and empirical approaches in service quality literature.

I. The Performance-Only Approach

Established by Cronin and Taylor (1992), this concept had as main idea, the fact that service quality was brought about by a customer’s exhibited attitude whose total perception only scores higher than when one considers the score owing to the existing gap in the customer perception and expectation. They went further to develop the SERVPERF model. This instrument gained more popularity with time because it offered a simplified measure of quality service measurement. The model applied 22 items in the SERVQUAL model but considered only the perception scores in the analysis.

Many studies have revealed that the SERVPERF model has proven to offer better explanation of variance when it comes to the total service quality over the SERVQUAL model (Lee, Lee & Yoo, 2000) and narrows the view and clarification on the service quality paradigm (Jain & Gupt, 2004). According to Parasuraman et al. (1994), the '…*difference in scores are by and large as sound as their direct measure counterparts, except in terms of predictive power* ...' However, Jain and Gupt (2004) noticed that the SERVQUAL model provides a higher probability to point out where management need to intervene for better service quality than does the SERVPERF model. Some examples of past research studies conducted with the application of the performance-only concept included Dabholkar et al., (1996); Sureshchander, Chanrasekharan, and Anantharam, (2001); Janda, Trocchia and Gwinner, (2002); Gounaris, (2005); Parasuraman et al., (2005); Caro and Gracia, (2007); Wilkins, Merrilees, and Herington, (2007). The studies which were empirically tested using factor analysis were measured and it supported the use of the performance-only concept to obtain the service quality perception.

II. The Disconfirmation Approach

At first the expectancy disconfirmation approach was applied in the physical goods industries. According to Oliver (1980), literature on customer satisfaction was the foundation of the concept which relied on the customer's decision concerning a product which was dependent on the expectations they have of the performance of that product. Since services were not tangible but were felt through experience, this construct was measured as a perceived service. In the approval of service quality according to Parasuraman et al. (1988), they assert that the degree to which service delivery equalled the customer's service expectation was indeed true.

Based on the disconfirmation approach, basically two principal perspectives exist concerning the service quality dimensions. Firstly, the Nordic model developed by Grönroos (1984) uses the technical and functional qualities generally to define service quality. Secondly, the SERVQUAL model (called also as the American perspective) developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) uses the attributes of an encounter in a service to explain service quality as a total ration of its constituents.

a. The Nordic Model - Grönroos (1984)

Grönroos (1984) was one of the first key authors to significantly contribute to the conceptual framework of service quality when he provided a definition for the service quality perception concept to be “the outcome of an evaluation process, where the customer compares his expectations with the service he perceived he has received”. According to the author, his definition was based on two qualities: the technical quality which has to do with the “what” or “the outcome” and the functional quality which has to do with the “how” or “the process”. In the technical quality, it was the “what” that was important during the service provision process whereas the functional quality talked about the process or how the interaction goes about for it to be delivered. The Nordic model was outlined next.

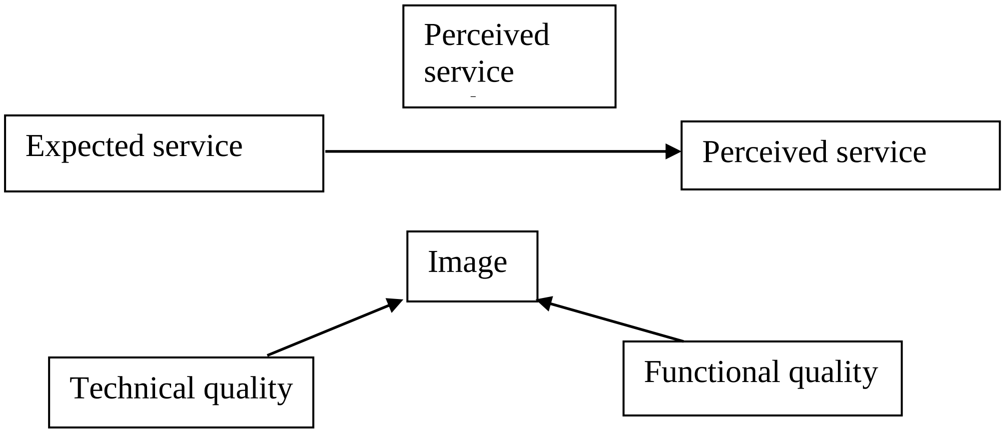


Figure 20: The Nordic Model
(Source: Grönroos 1984)

From Figure 20, corporate image kind of moderates the type of expected and perceived quality thus showing a higher-order construct. Grönroos (1984) suggested six qualities of service dimensions that relates very much to SERVQUAL. However, they came from different sources and not tested empirically by Grönroos. They included:

I. *Professionalism and skills*: These involve having the right knowledge and skills to be able to solve queries from customers tactfully.

II. *Attitude and Behaviour*: These involve at what level the service providers are concerned and interested to solve customer problems as a friend.

III. *Accessibility and Flexibility*: These involve the level of service accessibility and how it was adjusted to suit the demands of the customer.

IV. *Reliability and Trustworthiness*: These show how service promises are kept and respected with regards to the interest of the customer.

V. *Recovery*: This involves the steps taken to immediately arrest a wrong situation and keep the customer at bay when an unforeseen event happens.

VI. *Reputation and Credibility*: These entail the giving value for money of the customer and operations of high calibre.

b. SERVQUAL model - Parasuraman et al. (1985)

In 1985, the SERVQUAL model was published by Parasuraman, Ziethaml and Berry and was used to evaluate service quality across several service industries. The very essence of their definition was founded in the variance existing among the service expectation and the service perception performance. The “American perspective” model originated from the fifth gap of the service quality gap model. The information was obtained from customer focus groups in retail business. In the model, the fifth gap was defined to be the direction and magnitude of existing space between the service expectation and perception. Later, Parasuraman, et al. (1985), conducted a qualitative study that had to do with the views of customers vis-à-vis service quality. Their focus was about the process of delivering the service as seen by Grönroos (1984) and they established a list of ten service quality determinants (responsiveness, access, tangibles, reliability, security, competence, communication, courtesy, credibility and knowing customer needs) (Parasuraman et al., 1985).

The scale was made up of 44 statements that assessed customer expectations on how an item in a service was seen as excellent. It was rated on a seven-point Likert scale. In the second round there were 44 similar statements that determined the customer’s perception. The variances in the expectation and perception rankings were then calculated and the mean score became the SERVQUAL general score.

c. Importance-Performance Analysis (1977)

The Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) was an evaluative instrument with a method that reveals the relative status of several attributes and performance of an organisation. Over time, the use of IPA has proven its necessity and relevance to management and most especially, service marketers with one of its core benefits being the identification of zones for the enhancement of service quality. IPA was originally presented by Martilla and James (1977) and was present in many services. At first IPA was used in the automobile service department but has moved into other fields. For instance, according to Hudson et al. (2004:4), IPA applications in the past was used in various sectors such as health care (Cunningham & Gaeth, 1989), dental services (Nitse & Bush, 1993), banking sector (Ennew, Reed, & Binks, 1993), the hotel industry (Bush & Ortinau, 1986) and (Martin, 1995), adult education (Alberty & Mihalik, 1989), tourism policy (Chon, 1990), and tourist destinations (Hudson & Shephard, 1998).

Some authors replicated the IPA in different studies. Using the idea of IPA, Easingwood and Arnott (1991) conducted survey-based research of common primacies in service marketing. In the study, there were two dimensions applied: present effect on performance and the scope for improvement in relation to performance. They further proposed a matrix that would show the realities and the difficulties related to better performance to ease change. Slack (1994) augmented this matrix as he studied ways of modifying the matrix to reflect for improvement sake the perceived relationship of managers as concerns importance, performance, and priority. Within the health care domain, Dolinsky (1999) included the attribute of competitor's performance in the IPA. His reason was that an absence of this attribute could lead to inappropriate strategies being adopted.

According to Oh (2001), IPA was questionable in its validity and reliability. Its limitation arises from the main instrument. For example, one finds it difficult to apply the Likert scale to differentiate between various performance levels and importance. It equally does not consider the level of connection between cost, importance, and performance of service. Other issues included combining customers all together to have a common measure of perception or expectations under one attribute or service offering. Some customers may see an attribute as important but perceive it as poorly supplied and vice versa.

III. The Pivotal-Core-Peripheral (P-C-P) Approach

Philip and Hazlett (1997) developed the P-C-P model approach as a hierarchical model built based on a growing need to develop a specific service attribute. Moreover, owing to inappropriateness of the SERVQUAL to address a general service audience, there was a need for studies related to the evaluation of personalised services (Philip & Hazlett, 1997:273). Looking at the approach critically, organisational services are at three levels in which all dimensions and attributes were categorised. These included the input, the processes, and the output. It was likened to an organisation's system model in which the pivotal level was the output. Both core and peripheral together represent the input and the processes.

The pyramid structure of the P-C-P approach was composed of three parts beginning from the topmost part which was the pivotal attribute. This attribute focuses on the customers after having obtained enough information to enable the customer to decide. This attribute could be said to have some influence on their decision at the end of a service process. Rightfully, one can say that this attribute contributes in a way to achieving customer satisfaction. Therefore, a possible description of this pivotal attribute could be the "take away" or outcome after a service encounter process. The second attribute was the core attribute. This comprised of all the system processes, the service structure of the organisation together with human interaction all functioning as one whole to achieve the pivotal attribute. The attributes included reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. In simpler terms, the core dimension happens when the customer interacts with the service provider. At the base level of the pyramid was the peripheral attributes made up of tangibles and access. They are the "incidental extras" that enhance the wholeness to the process to make the customer experience a delightful experience (Philip & Hazlett, 1997:274). Figure 21 shows the P-C-P service attribute approach pyramid.

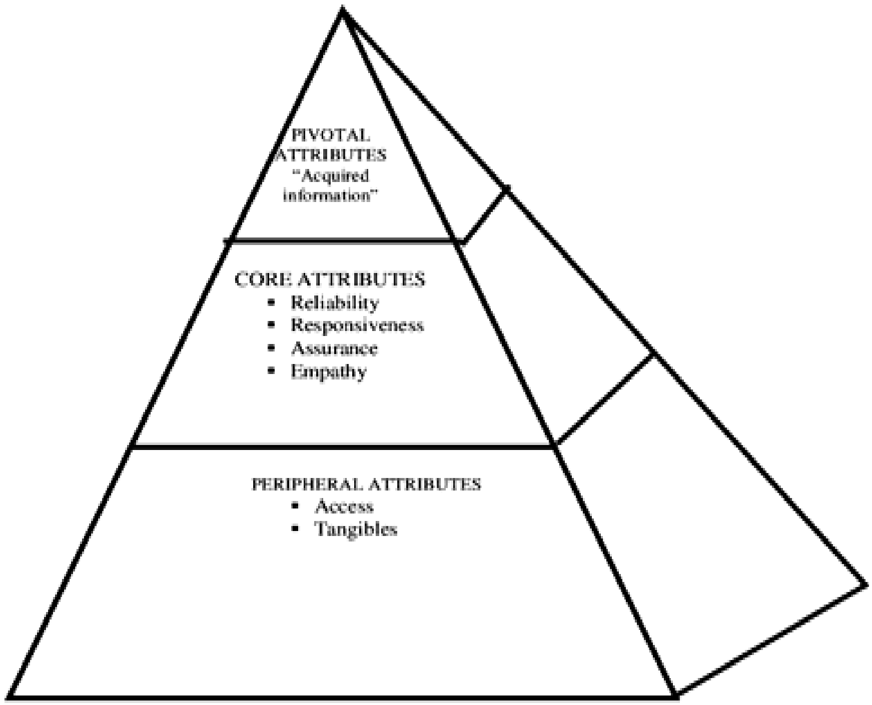


Figure 21: The P-C-P Service Attribute approach
Source: Philip and Hazlett (1997:279)

IV. Synthesized Model of Service Quality

This theory was developed by Brogowicz, Delene and Lyth (1990). This model came about after a careful examination of previous studies and models developed in service quality from two research streams, namely, the Nordic school and the North American school (Pilelienė & Simkus, 2012:108). The model brings together from other models the concept of the functional and technical quality, gaps in service quality and quality service perception factors and dimensions. According to Seth, Deshmunk and Vrat (2005), the peculiarity of this model was that they may be some existing service quality gap even before customer experiences the service obtained through media, word of mouth or even advertisement (Pilelienė & Simkus, 2012:108).

Seth et al. (2005) also stated that the synthesised model attempted to incorporate the traditional managerial theory, operations, marketing strategy and service design under one roof. Summarily, the model aimed at identifying all related service quality dimensions within the planning, implementation, and control phases in the normal managerial framework (Seth et al., 2005 cited in Pilelienė & Simkus, 2012:110). It was therefore important to integrate the perspectives and ideas of the potential customers with that of real time customers to get a bigger and complete picture. According to the authors of this synthesised model, the service quality gap results after the customer's expectations of quality service are surpassed (Seth et al., 2005).

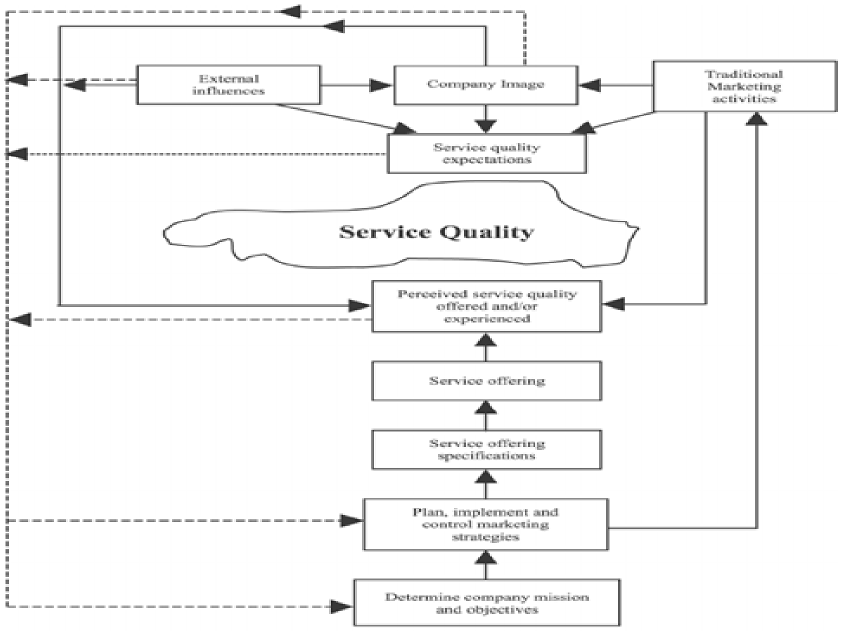


Figure 22: Synthesized Service Quality Model
(Source: Brogowicz, Delene and Lyth 1990)

V. Tour Operator Service Quality Model

Pilelienė and Simkus (2012) were the authors who established this model. It was founded following the analysis, criticism, and improvement of three service quality evaluation models described as being suitable for tourism (TO businesses), namely: Grönroos' (1984) worked on the Perceived Service Quality model; Parasuraman et al.'s (1985,1988) on the Service Gap model and Brogowicz et al.'s (1990) on the Synthesized Service Quality model. From the viewpoint of the customer, service quality was perceived in a multidimensional way. This model has two main compartments with the presentation of the various levels in which the customer and the service provider (e.g., TO) are involved in the service provision cycle. In total there are five levels. Level 1-4 concerns the TO beginning with the vision and mission and objectives set by the TO towards ensuring service quality was observed.

Level two focuses on how the TO governs the expectations of the customer, level three sets out the service quality standards which included the technical qualities and the functional qualities, level four shows how services are provided to the customer via marketing, communication, and corporate image among other external factors. Meanwhile, level five concerns the customer in which the customer assesses the delivered service against perception based on customer behaviour (Pilelienė & Simkus, 2012:111).

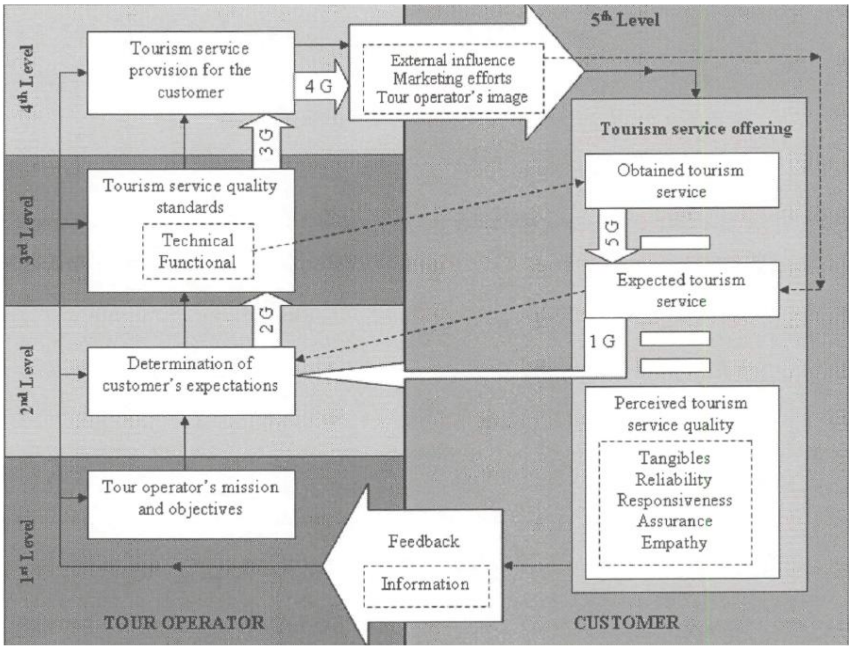


Figure 23: Tour operator service quality evaluation model
(Source: Pilelienė & Simkus 2012:110)

4.3 MEASURING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

The organisational practice involving the measure of customer experience at the different touch points along the customer journey together with all the actions involved was what was referred to as customer experience measurement. From a strategic angle, the reason for measuring customer experience was by using that knowledge to bring about a much-desired customer experience which in the long-term would bring about loyalty. According to Forrester (2017), the author of the state of the customer analytics, about three quarter of businesses have acknowledged that managing customer experience was among their top priorities as it helped improve customer loyalty.

Going by Forrester's model, measuring customer experience must happen at three stages; the customer relationship stage; at different points along the customer journey; and lastly, during the "moments of truth". This indicates that it was challenging for many organisations to maintain high level standards in the competitive marketplace. Customer experience involves both direct and indirect measures. According to Löytänä and Korkiakoski (2014: 137), the direct measures of customer experience included measurement at the different points of the customer journey and in key touch points while the customer relationship was an indirect measure of the customer encounter.

One of such challenges was making the organisation customer-centric. Customer-centrism was core to most service businesses and organisations. Measuring the level of customer experience enables them to understand the customer needs through the collection and analysis of information to provide a better and clearer perspective and therefore build an organisation that solely focuses on the customer needs. By doing this, organisations are aware of which customer was satisfied or dissatisfied and how the satisfaction level could be improved to cater more for the customer's expectation and therefore, improve the level of service quality in the organisation. Equally, according to Gautam (2017), customer experience measurement allows organisations to see how well their performance are doing in terms of customer experience strategy and meeting up with key performance indicators set.

Measuring customer experience throughout the customer journey could be performed by taking the following steps:

I. **Profiling the Customer:** Such a practice was conducted through customer research by organisations to obtain relevant information concerning their target audience. An understanding of the customer puts the organisation in a position to think and possibly act like the customer. The information could be used when doing email marketing or even SMS marketing to send out the right content that appeals to them thereby offering the right type of services that better engages and results in better experiences.

II. **Leave no touch points:** Identifying all the customer touch points throughout the customer journey and analysing them from the beginning to the end provides a map of the whole experience journey from the angle of the customer. It was suggested that those that will create and mark a great impression in the minds of the customer and leave good memories in them must be chosen. It was also good to develop matrix for such touch points that measure their performance and see how best it was improved to leverage on customer experience.

III. **Tackle key problem areas:** Having identified all touch points, the very nature of an experience was unique to one's persona and unique to every individual in nature and therefore to assess it could be a daunting task (Knutson et al., 2009). Experiences are intangible, different from physical products having a tangible characteristic and do not often follow the laws of economics. Before Pine and Gilmore (1999) introduced the experience economy, issues of service quality and customer satisfaction appeared to be the most important issues to focus on when it came to obtaining competitive edge in the tourism and hospitality industry and because customer experience was not considered, this theory showed insufficiency. According to Bell et al. (2002), since the 1990s, organisations are putting more emphasis on personalised and tailor-made services compared to goods. Therefore, this brought about products created based on the particular preferences of the customer (Knutson et al., 2009).

Some past research studies had attempted establishing several customer experience scales. For example, tools like the customer experience index by Knutson et al. (2009); experiential value scale by Mathwick et al. (2002): the sensation seeking scale by Zuckerman (1994); pleasure arousal dominance scale by Mehrabian and Russell (1974); and the absorbing experience scale by Swanson (1978). Oh et al. (2007) designed from Pine and Gilmore’s (1999) customer experience model a new scale. It comprised 16 elements applied to evaluate the four customer experience dimensions. Applying the scale for the first time, the findings showed a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction, repurchase and revisit intentions owing to the customer experience.

Research on current issues of customer experience in tourism organisations (such as TO, travel agency) could be considered an important area in future research given that for now there was little empirical research existing on this topic in research.

4.4 SERVQUAL MODEL

From the aim of the research that seeks to establish and propose the service quality framework for service quality evaluation concerning ITOs, the framework would be developed as a modification and extension of the SERVQUAL model. The choice of SERVQUAL was because it has a scale with different items that were used to measure the gap between expectation and perception (Nguya, Kariuki & Muthengi, 2021:153). SERVQUAL, according to Evans (2015:868), could be said to be “a framework developed to consider service quality”.

In the past, the instrument to measure service quality was by using a customer satisfaction survey. Nevertheless, to show proof of their real relationship to service quality, the endorsement of some of the tools may are scientifically tested. The SERVQUAL model happens to be among the endorsed service quality measurement instruments and its application was so widely used in different industries, including tourism. (Radder & Han, 2011; Deb & Ahmed, 2018 and Rajeswari & Kumari, 2014).

According to Mill (2011), SERVQUAL was still a very relevant and suitable instrument that explains how customer satisfaction was obtained within tourism businesses. Developed from the first version of the conceptual gap framework by Parasuraman, et al. (1985, 1988; 1991), collaboration was going on for more than three decades since the 1980s. This framework was recognised as a major contribution to operations management within organisations and marketing literature and was the foundation of many service quality evaluation studies. It will also serve as the basis for this research. The SERVQUAL framework that measures the expectation and the perception of the customer, at first consisted of 22 service attribute items clustered under five dimensions: tangibility, empathy, assurance, reliability, and responsiveness (Table 7). Grönroos added a sixth dimension which was recovery (Grönroos, 1988). Chou et al. (2011) and Kuo, Chou and Sun (2011) concur that these dimensions are the most widely used and well-known variables to assess service quality.

Table 7: SERVQUAL R.A.T.E.R Dimensions

SERVICE QUALITY DIMENSION	**DEFINITION**
Reliability	Being able to deliver in a dependable and accurate way (Parasuraman et al. 1988:23). According to George (2011:464) in support of this definition stated "… the organisation's employees should perform the desired service correctly the first time …". This implies upon first contact with a TO, the customer's first impression matters.
Assurance (included courtesy, security, combination of competence, credibility,)	According to Parasuraman et al. (1988:23), the company employees via various courteous ways and knowledge can instil belief and confidence in the customer and according to George (2011:465), assurance was "the ability to convey trustworthiness and evoke a feeling of confidence in customers".

Tangibility	It was how one sees the company's facilities, employees, equipment, and communication gadgets. Parasuraman et al. (1988:23) defined tangibility as "the physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel" meanwhile Ismail, Haron, Ibrahim, and Isa (2006:740) stated it is '… the appearances of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and written materials'. Hence, tourism owners and managers have the duty to train their employees to deliver services to their customers in a customized manner (Evans, 2015).
Empathy (comprises access, customer knowledge and communication)	According to Parasuraman et al. (1988:23), it was an indication of how much care and personalised attention was given to the customer by the service provider company. George (2011:465) asserts that customers should be treated as individuals by employees of the service providing organisation. In cases of mishaps or complaints from customers, the service provider must show some degree of personal attention to the customer.
Responsiveness	Parasuraman et al. (1988:23) highlight that it was how willing and ready a service providing organisation was to give real time service or support to the satisfaction of the customer and the guarantee that a service was actually well delivered with the employees ready to provide maximum service and aid to the customer (George, 2011:464).

Source: Parasuraman et al. (1988:23)

SERVQUAL model was scrutinised over the years with different publications authored by famous researchers (Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1993, 1994, 2004; Zeithaml, et al., 1996; Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Malhotra, 2002; Parasuraman, et al. 2005). They further reduced in 1988, the original number of service quality determinants from ten to five as seen in Table 2 (p.65). The wordings from the original text were modified in 1991 to relate more on the customer expectations. Its measure was polished by using the adequate, perceived and desired measures. Parasuraman et al. (1994) did an extension on the scale to reflect nine instead of the original seven-Likert scale in which the scale of "no opinion" was added.

SERVQUAL was described by many researchers including its pioneer authors, Parasuraman et al. as an excellent service quality assessment tool; it has grown in popularity and application worldwide. They maintained that this model's succinct scale items would bring much meaning to several service organisations. The interest and effect in the service industry was seen in the number of citations of the different related model versions of the SERVQUAL. Some interesting statistics included the existence of 130 citations published in

59 journals of the 1985 model by June 1995 with seven self-citations by the author and the 1988 SERVQUAL model had 81 citations published in 37 journals with six self-citations by the author (Philip & Hazlett, 1997:268).

Considering the citation analyses of both versions of the SERVQUAL, it points at the fact that the published works were within the marketing and retailing areas. Since the author's works focused on these sectors, the tested model probably registered a huge success even though it may not reflect the same in other sectors of service provision. Worthy to note here that according to the citation analyses, 41 single citations of the 1985 SERVQUAL and 26 single citations of the 1988 SERVQUAL were applied showing the use of the model within different service sectors (Philip & Hazlett, 1997:269).

Though its popularity continues to increase by the year, SERVQUAL was equally criticized (Buttle, 1996) as other researchers have commented showing the limitations of the model such as its length and predictive power. According to Hoffman and Bateson (2011), the length of the questionnaire made up of 44 questions was too long and resulted to respondents getting tired. Hoffman and Bateson (1997) had earlier appraised the model's predictive strength, where they said the predictability of the purchase intention of the customer was not more than the tool used to measure the performance of the service. This argument was in support to that stated by Parasuraman et al (1994) and Zhang (2009) who assert that with the use of the component of perception the predictive validity will not be lower than if one used the expectation versus perception score difference.

Equally, concerning service quality measurement, Cronin and Taylor (1992: 1994) and Brady et al. (2002) expressed their preference to use only the service performance perception (Narangajavana, 2007). According to Philip and Hazlett (1997:269), they closely examined ABI/INFORM database articles whose theme focused on SERVQUAL. They realised that out of the 22 outputs, there were five self-citations, five were SERVQUAL critical, ten were on the model applicability mode and two concerned the service quality papers. Of all papers examined, one quarter had serious reservations on the use of SERVQUAL.

Teas in trying to ameliorate the conceptual and operational models of SERVQUAL mentioned in his 1993 *Journal of Marketing* article titled "Expectations, performance evaluation and customer's perceptions of quality", that he acknowledged the works and enormous contributions of Parasuraman et al. However, he responded otherwise to how expectation was conceptually and operationally defined (Teas, 1993). In fact, he argued on certain points that attacked the model empirically and theoretically. During a meeting, Teas was equivocal in his argument that was since a model's operational and empirical definition "must be based on strong, theoretical footings" Or else, they would become vague, ambiguous and surely affect the foundation of the validity of the quantitative models (Grapentine, 1998:12). However, according to Grapentine (1998:12), what was controversial in Teas' argumentation was that in the domain of marketing, he trusted in some conceptual definitions that was based on strong theoretical foundation. This was because of the absence of a unified language scheme particular to the domain of marketing.

The role of quality service as an intermediary for the achievement of customer satisfaction that may further influence the purchase intention of a customer was very important and relevant. According to Cronin and Taylor (1992), "service quality was an antecedent of customer satisfaction and that it exerts a stronger influence on purchase intentions than does service quality." The authors proposed that management must understand that more emphasis should be laid on the customer satisfaction agenda rather than on setting up strategies that must look out only for quality service **(**Nguya, et al., 2021; Narangajavana, 2007).

Concerning how to measure the expectations of the customer, Baron and Harris (2003) insisted on the time feature as very vital. For instance, in the SERVQUAL model, the customer's responses of the perception and expectations of a certain service must be rated equally based following each of the 22 items.

Generally, the respondents are interrogated to rate both their expectations and perceptions in one seating. Considering the use of retrospective customer expectations in assessing post-purchase intentions, then the expectations first measured could be argued via a biased customer experience (Zhang, 2009). A summary of the major criticism and changes of the SERVQUAL model by other researchers could be seen below.

Table 8: The Evolution of SERVQUAL

SERVQUAL	DIMENSIONS	DRAWBACKS & ISSUES
The Gap Model (1985)	The quality service determinants included: - Tangibility, responsiveness, courtesy, competence, reliability access, knowledge of	More focus was on the service delivery process.

	customer needs communication, credibility, and security	
SERVQUAL (1988)	Using factor analysis, the dimensions of reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness were established. - A 7-point Likert scale was applied.	- The reliability of the different scores associated were not supported theoretically - Use of negative wording of scores.
SERVQUAL (1991)	- No use of negative wording - The normative word “should” was replaced by the word “would”. -100 points shared among the R.A.T.E.R dimensions based on a 10-point scale.	- According to Teas (1994) the part on expectation was not well conceptualized. - According to Babakus and Boller (1992) based on the factor loadings there was a weakness in the convergent validity which in different researches are not consistent.
SERVQUAL (1993)	The theme of customer expectation was understood to either mean adequate service; desired service or predicted service.	- Dimensions not retrievable - Questionable reliability and validity of the score difference.
SERVQUAL (1994)	- The 22 items were modified to 21 items using a 9-point Likert scale. - Had the option of “no opinion”.	- In forecasting inclusive evaluation, the perception scores had a better performance than the gap scores (McAlexander et al. 1994)
SERVQUAL (1996)	It focused on the conceptual background of the financial and behavioural consequences of service quality.	- The Dimensions cannot be retrieved. - Dabholkar Shephard and Thorpe (2000) and Brady and Cronin (2001) clamoured for the exclusion of the expectation component.
SITEQUAL (2001)	-Measurement tool for online service quality in websites developed by Yoo and Donthu (2001). -Has four dimensions: aesthetics, ease of use, security and processing speed	Ease of Use was identified to be very significant e-service quality dimension (Dabholkar 1996; Morris and Turner 2001).
E-S-QUAL (2005)	- Established by Parasuraman et al. (2005) the adapted model was to measure e-service quality - There are 5 dimensions of e-service quality: privacy, efficiency, System availability and fulfilment. - Three service recovery dimensions identified: Responsiveness, Compensation, Contact	- Collier and Bienstock (2006) have called for the inclusion of the service recovery component in the overall service quality perception.
WEBQUAL (2007)	- Developed by Loiacono et al. (2007) to measure website quality. It is based on the theory of	It does not show superiority over SERVQUAL and does

	reasoned action (TRA) and the Technology Accepted Model (TAM). -Identified 12 dimensions: visual appearance, trust, Ease to understand, tailored information, information fitness, response time, level of emotion, nature of innovation, image consistency, intuition, types of advantages and nature of completeness.	not provide the depth and breadth for validating the SERVQUAL.
RENTQUAL (2009)	It was established by Erdogan Haktan Ekiz, Ali Bavik and Huseyin Arasli. The empirical study aimed to develop a scale to measure the service quality in the car rental services consisting of 18-item with the emergence of six factors: delivery, comfort, ergonomics, accessibility, handing over and safety being the most important factor.	
CASERV (2012)	Developed by Wong and Fong using the approach of mixed method for service quality measurement in the Casino industry. It follows an adaptation form the SERVPERF and Three Component models.	Was tested and validated in the Chinese market thus poses a limitation when it comes to other sectors and countries.
AIRQUAL, 2015	This modified SERVQUAL model was used to assess the service quality in the airline industry that was developed by Aloitabi M. The model identified a 30-item scale with five dimensions. The scale was further improved and tested in Saudi Arabia a new market.	This model lacks validity due to its half developmental process. The model was developed and only applied in Cyprus.

Source: Author’s Analysis and elaboration

These foregoing criticisms just like others pushed Cronin and Taylor (1992; 1994) to resolve that questions on perception only should be used while all questions on expectations be removed. Accordingly, this led to the development of the SERVPERF model which relied on the items of perception in the SERVQUAL model though it was disputed that the new model dwelled more on the variance when considering to whole service quality measurement instrument (Abdullah et al., 2012:135; Nguya, et al., 2021).

4.5 SERVQUAL MEASUREMENT ISSUES

The application of the SERVQUAL model over a broad range of service-related sectors as an assessment instrument has raised some issues over the problems of quality service measurement. First and foremost, previous research studies consider the intrinsic weaknesses of this measurement scale and propose ways of enhancement. There was a growing interest of discontent over the present service quality conceptualisation hence operationalizing it as a concept was presumed as largely insufficient and flawed (Philip & Hazlett, 1997:269).

Literature was not clear on the quality service nature or its conceptualisation as there was still some confusion when it comes to having a clear comprehension of the service quality concept and the relationship to satisfying the customer. There was even some debates going on in literature whether the two; that is, customer satisfaction and service quality are two separate ideas and how are their true natures different. According to Parasuraman et al. (1988) and Bolton and Drew (1991), there was a school of thought that agreed and stated that satisfying a customer was a decision taken in transit during a particular encounter meanwhile the service quality was a general evaluation taken over a long-term based behaviour. Some other studies have suggested that in customer satisfaction when the evaluation of a particular transaction accumulated with time, it resulted into some kind of general service quality assessment.

This indicated there was a direct relationship shift which could be moving from customer satisfaction to that of service quality. According to Johnston et al. (1990), this opinion was argued and indeed was being argued by another school of thought which rather stated that the fundamental connection was from the service quality towards customer satisfaction. This appeared to be very confusing and remained unresolved to date.

At some point doubts are cast over what exactly SERVQUAL measures. Going by the definition of Parasuraman et al., SERVQUAL was about measuring a particular long-term attitude called service quality happening at one point in time called customer satisfaction (Philip & Hazlett, 1997:270). Was it therefore about the measurement of quality service or customer satisfaction? Scholars have opined that it was neither of them.

About the dimensionality of the SERVQUAL model, there are issues that have come up that have to do with the psychometric viability of a service quality concept operationalization to be the variation between the service expectation and perception (Peter & Brown, 1993). Carman (1990) in raising questions on the SERVQUAL dimensionality, asked for the total number of dimensions that are assessed. Was it the two dimensions of functional and technical quality sometimes including the corporate image? or the five-dimension attributes. Some studies have gone further to propose that the concept of quality service was unidirectional though most researchers say that it was a multidirectional construct.

Cronin and Taylor (1994) conducted research in four industries, namely; fast food, pest control, dry cleaning, and banking. Their findings showed that the application of the suggested five dimensions of SERVQUAL did not reflect in any of their samples. Carman (1990) proposed that caution was required when applying the SERVQUAL as each service sector had its own unique set of dimensions.

Another challenge was in the variable types used during the questionnaire phase which was relevant. In past studies it was proven that quality service determinants differ for each individual respondent and throughout different service environments, hence may be inappropriate (Philip & Hazlett, 1997:271). In the original SERVQUAL model, there were negatively worded statements. This caused respondents to be more careful and read between the lines to wipe out any form of bias. More often, this got the respondents more confused and took them more time to ponder on the questions. As a result, Parasuraman et al. (1991) reworded their statements to better the understanding of the construct.

According to Gilmore and Carson (1992), another cause of disagreement was why the use the seven-point Likert scale to develop the model given that it may tend to hide the variance between customer expectation and perception. Taking for example, consider a customer who thinks that his/her expectations fall between 3 and 4 while the perceptions fall between 4 and 5. There would be no difference between perception and expectation in the measurements recorded whereas it shows there was a difference. Having raised these issues concerning the SERVQUAL model, the debate was ongoing to find assessment models fitting to each particular service industry. Nevertheless, the contribution of the SERVQUAL model cannot be refuted but rather modified and used as a foundation to build a more suitable and adapted construct. It was against this identified knowledge gap that this study suggested a tailored service quality assessment tool for the ITO industry.

4.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The review of literature comprised examining, analysing and discussing the extant literature mainly secondary information sources such as different journal articles from reputable publishers, ebooks etc. related to service quality and its assessment models. This chapter which formed an essential part of the literature review examined the theoretical underpinnings related to service quality such as the performance-only approach, the disconfirmation approach, the importance-performance analysis and the pivotal-core-peripheral (p-c-p) approach as seen in section 4.2. Based on the disconfirmation approach, two principal perspectives exist concerning the service quality dimensions. Firstly, was the Nordic model developed by Grönroos (1984) which made use of the technical and functional qualities that helped define service quality evaluation. Secondly, the SERVQUAL model (called also as the American perspective) developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) made use of the attributes of an encounter in a service to explain service quality as a total ration of its constituents. Equally, there were discussions on how to measure customer experience such as profiling the customer and developing personas; leaving no touch points; tackling the key problem areas; and how it links to service quality evaluation as seen in section 4.3. Also, this chapter critically analysed the pioneer and most applied service quality assessment model the SERVQUAL and its evolution and modifications as applied in different studies over the years for instance Gap model (1985), SERVQUAL (1988), SITEQUAL (2001), E-S-QUAL (2005); CASERV (2012), AIRQUAL (2015) as seen in section 4.4. Further on, the chapter presented some issues raised about the SERVQUAL measurement like there was even some debating going on in literature whether customer satisfaction and service quality are two separate concepts and how are their true natures different as seen in section 4.5. The second part of this study which suggests an evaluative framework would be an extensive presentation and elucidation of the proposed framework for ITO service quality evaluation, that would be presented in the next chapter.

PART 2

SUGGESTION OF A FRAMEWORK FOR THE EVALUATION OF INBOUND TOUR OPERATOR SERVICE QUALITY

CHAPTER FIVE

DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

5.1 INTRODUCTION

A research framework comprises the skeleton of a study, of course indicating the various concept(s) used. This was some sort of a backbone skeleton that underlies a research that leads to the achievement of its aim, objectives, and hypotheses. In this research, the study framework consists of a concept build up, pulled together, and schematised to give some map form (Liehr & Smith, 2009). According to Dwivedi (2008), the framework represents movement in a sure and concise way making the research objectives to be clear, simple, and focused (Punch, 2005). As an essential component of a quantitative research, a framework tries to explain the research questions (Collis & Hussey, 2003; Punch, 2005). Through a framework, every irrelevant information was discarded (Dwivedi, 2008) and more light was thrown to what was known and thought of concerning the topic being researched (Punch, 2005).

The conceptual framework was believed to be the schema which clarifies in the best possible manner and illustrating the correlation between independent and dependent variables in the research. It was strongly related to the theories and constructs presented and expounded in the literature review and it shows how the researcher hopes to explore the research problem. The conceptual framework in this research brings forth a foundation for analysis (Fisher, 2007). This section would therefore seek to resolve the following research questions examined in chapter 1.

I. To what extent was it possible and feasible to elaborate and suggest an evaluative service quality framework in the TO industry?

II. Which model factors and dimensions were used to measure customer perception and performance to bring about improved service quality management within the TO business?

In the opinion of Ravich and Carl (2016), the conceptual framework was a generative framework reflecting the thoughts of the whole research process through diagrams and arrows that clearly define the variables of the topic under study. From the statistical point of view, it explains the relation that exists between the different concepts painting a clear picture of how ideas on the related topic intertwine with each other (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Luse, Mennecke and Townsend (2012) claimed that a framework aids in defining theories and specifies the problem in the study. Fisher (2007) defines a good conceptual framework to be one that was well explained indicating the relationship of the theories and constructs outlined and how they help to answer the research problem identified. It was simply an abstract of reality comprising a set of theories that describe a process, object or event that allows relationships to be interpreted and examined through the operational framework which will also be expounded in section 5.5 of this chapter.

The next paragraphs of our study dwelled on examining ITO products and services (section 5.2) and service quality evaluation theories (section 5.3), a presentation of the proposed conceptual framework (section 5.4) and the operational framework (section 5.5) on which this empirical study was based. Finally, this chapter ended with a summary.

5.2 ITO SERVICES AND PRODUCT OFFERING

TOs are described by many scholars as important players and linkage points in the tourism industry's distribution chain was elaborately expounded in chapter 1 (1.1). According to Kikemu (2017), TOs are the only pure tourism organisations which influence the customer's behaviour given that they were present before, during and even after the tourism experience. TOs possess the customer's travel programme information including flights details, hotel, meals, ground transport and visiting schedule. All these are presented in the form of tour packages (in a single product) sold at a specific price by the TO (Sheldon, 1986). Service quality assessment for an intermediary such as a TO was to ensure that buyers and sellers are brought together for the opening of new markets or to effectively foster extant markets for expansion. TOs are very significant in the tourism industry especially in the SSA. According to Twining-Ward (2010), it was purported that the TO include about 2500 to 3000 ground operators providing direct employment of between 35 000 to 40 000 jobs.

ITOs otherwise known as ground operators or destination management companies (DMC) are the home-grown experts of that destination's touristic products and services. ITOs build tour packages for individuals or in collaboration with other TOs. The tour packages are services comprising various components such as transportation, catering, hotel, restoration, leisure, foreign exchange etc. which they put together as per the customer's budget and duration of stay at that destination. Often than not, the ITOs master just one country but it so happens that they may sell another country's tour package. According to USAID (2007), ITOs should have a deeper understanding of the destination, offer good value for money, have high demand for their product, deliver high quality and customer service and deliver a unique experience. All these revolve around seven key pillars providing opportunities for the ITO to succeed. They were facilities and amenities, accessibility and connectivity, business and the investment policy, diversity of natural / cultural products, geographical location, human resources, democratic/ diplomatic status, and image (Kikemu, 2017). What constitutes the main service quality evaluation foundation in a TO industry was examined in the next sub-section.

5.3 MAJOR SERVICE QUALITY EVALUATION CONSTRUCTS

Based on extant literature already reviewed in chapter 2 section 2.6 and 2.7 and chapter 4 section 4.3 and 4.4, this study would focus on the SERVQUAL instrument. The SERVQUAL model had five dimensions, namely; reliability, tangibility, assurance, responsiveness, and empathy. These dimensions were explored in this study during the data collection phase. Judging from previous studies, the SERVQUAL model was considered by several authors (Nguya, et al., 2021; Deb & Ahmed, 2018; Rajeswari & Kumari, 2014; Radder & Han, 2011; Mill, 2011 and Philip & Hazlett, 1997) among many others as the most widely applied model in service quality research. As presented in the previous chapter, SERVQUAL developed by Parasuraman, Berry and Ziethaml (1985) had undergone several adjustments, modifications and applications in various settings and industries, hotel, restaurant, airlines and casinos but not for the TOs.

Among these different settings and industries in tourism and hospitality are the TOs whose role (especially in the Central African sub-region) has not been fully understood and few studies were conducted. It was on this backdrop of the limited research on service quality in general and its evaluation in the TO industry (Hudson et al. 1998) especially, which serves as motivation for conducting this project and therefore, adding to the existing literature in this field of study.

Despite the positive appraisals of the SERVQUAL construct, other researchers such as O'Neill and Palmer (2011:184); Blessic *et al*. (2011:7); Buttle (1996:24); Cronin and Taylor (1992:57-58) criticised SERVQUAL. The sub-section that follows would discuss the conceptual framework of this study.

5.4 THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical model was the "ground zero" point of any study as it describes the links of different variables that constitute the research problem. The conceptual framework of this study gave a vivid picture of the topic of the study under investigation and aided in generating hypotheses that were tested (Fatthiea, 2012:70) and validated. Based on previous literature, the theoretical framework for this research was presented in figure 20 as a guide to the next phase of this study. This framework was imperative because contrary to most literature on service quality evaluation which focuses only on customer service quality, this framework considers the perception-expectation relationship between ITO (managers and employees) on the one hand as service providers and that of the customers who of course on the other hand are the higher priority as service receivers. Examining these three key actors gave a better understanding and paints a holistic picture which helps to build a strong, suitable vision, mission and objectives for the organisation and provides an appropriately tailored service quality strategic plan by hierarchy for the whole service quality assessment system.

According to Pilelienė et al. (2012), in scientific literature, the three most suitable service quality assessment models applicable in tourism studies are the service quality model, the Perceived Service Quality model and the Synthesised Service Quality model by Parasuraman et al. (1985), Gronroos (1984) and Brogowicz et al. (1990) respectively. In the SERVQUAL model established by Parasuraman et al. (1985), there were five main ingredients as factors that contributed to the obtention of good quality service. These included (1) word of mouth; (2) past experiences; (3) individual customer needs; (4) indirect means of communication with the customer; and (5) the composition of the service product (Urban, 2010).

According to Urban (2010), the first four factors influence the expectations of the customer while the fifth and last factor rather focuses on the perception of quality. These factors influence the expected service as would be shown further in the proposed ITOSQUAL conceptual framework for ITOs. Therefore, for this research, there are two principal models that would be referenced to develop the proposed ITOSQUAL model.

I. The TO's service quality evaluation model developed by Pilelienė and Simkus (2012). Based on studies carried out in this field by Lina et al. (2012), the TO's Service Quality Evaluation Model was applied and tested owing to its relevance to this research. The TO's Service Quality Evaluation Model was a synthesis of various service quality evaluation models such as Grönroos' (1984) Perceived Service Quality Model; Parasuraman et al.'s. (1985, 1988) Service Gap Analysis Model and Brogowicz et al.'s (1990) Synthesised Service Quality Model. These models were discussed in-depth in chapter 4.1 and were chosen because of their relevance to the TO industry; hence, the proposed model will further focus on new knowledge about the ITOs.

II. The SERVQUAL model established by Parasuraman et al. 1985 was the most widely applied model when it comes to service quality evaluation (Nguya, et al., 2021; Deb & Ahmed, 2018; Rajeswari & Kumari, 2014; Radder & Han, 2011). The dimensions used in this model are very much aligned with the objectives of this study. Just like in other research studies that had developed models adapted from SERVQUAL, this study would just queue in to add to the list of scientifically tested modified models as presented in Table 7 on the evolution of the SERVQUAL model presented in chapter 4. With the understanding that this study seeks to establish a holistic framework based on the SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman et al. (1985) which was chosen to be the main theoretical construct for this study, the following determinants: reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness would be used as a base from which to identify service quality determinant factors specific to the ITO.

The presence of a conceptual framework in a quantitative study gives much advantage to the research. For example, according to Akintoye (2015), the conceptual framework was the most down to earth way in which a research presents the asserted solutions to the problem identified or defined. Grant and Osanloo (2014) opined that the conceptual framework supports the researcher to identify and construct the global view of the phenomenon under study. It gives reason as to why the topic of the research was relevant, as it shows the researcher's assumptions, those other authors who are for and against the main idea in the research and how their approach was grounded in concept. Akintoye (2015) further posits that most at times that conceptual framework was applied in research which lacks existing concepts or where theories are not sufficient to create a firm construct of the study. The next paragraph explains the flow of the conceptual framework.

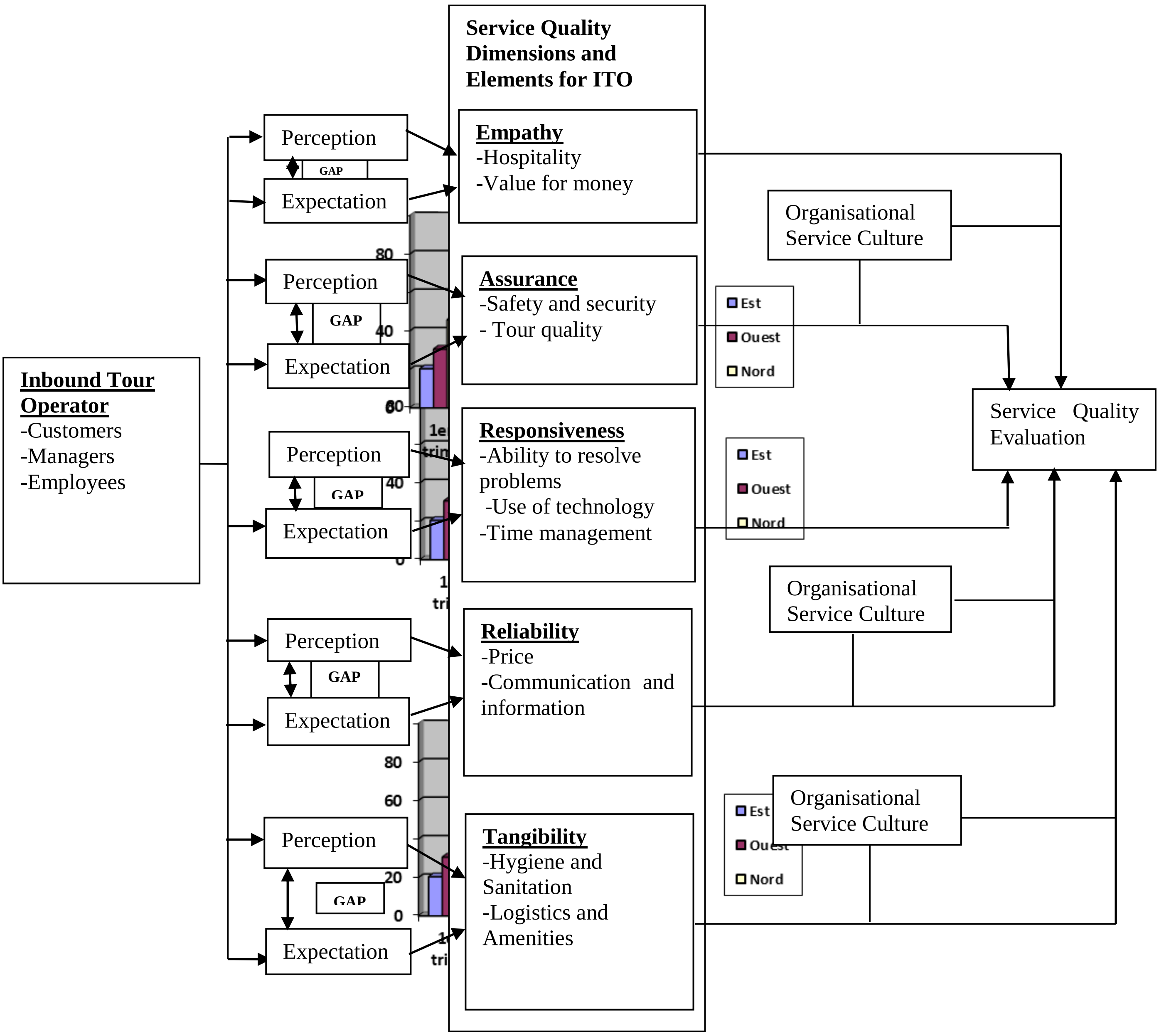


Figure 24: The conceptual framework.
Source: Author’s elaboration based on extant literature.

This study’s conceptual framework presented in Figure 24 illustrated the relationship between the independent [empathy, assurance, responsiveness, reliability, and tangibility] variables and dependent variable [service quality evaluation]. Organisational service culture was considered in this illustration as a moderator variable. Some important points that were considered in the construct of the conceptual framework included, determinants of quality service dimensions, the perceived and expected quality service factors of stakeholders (managers, employees, and customers) and of course the ITO stakeholders [customers, managers, and employees].

The conceptual framework for this study included the ITO stakeholders that was the service provider here represented by the ITO (managers and employees) and the customers as the service receiver. From the Gap model developed by Parasuraman et al. 1985:44-46), “GAP” in the diagram was defined as the existing difference between perceived and expected service from the ITO stakeholders [customers, managers, and employees]. This difference in perception and expectation had a bearing on service quality determinants and elements identified in existing literature which in turn brings about non-coherence in service quality evaluation. The moderator variable in this framework was the organisational service culture. This was important in the establishment of the service quality standards and must be taken seriously by companies.

As mentioned in chapter 2.4, the service concept that was first used by Sasser et al. (1978) attempted to generate the type of services to be provided and/or received in a straightforward, accepted, and shared way ensuring the motive of the service was delivered (Johnston et al., 2012). For the staff of the ITO (managers, and employees) to understand what the customer needs, applicable knowledge of the service culture as the starting point to creates an operations strategy was imperative (Goldstein et al., 2002) which concerns all company’s management functions (i.e., marketing, human resources, operations, finance).

Previous literature on service quality focused so much on customer’s perception and expectation with a near total neglect given to the quality service expectation and perception of the manager and employee of the organisation. This conceptual framework was different in that not only are the customer's views considered but also the views of the company's workforce [managers and employees].

This conceptual framework was considered both at the strategic and operational levels. At the strategic level, knowledge about customer needs was used to define and communicate the nature of the business and to drive innovation and strategic competitive advantage. At the operational level, the different management functions such as the marketing, human resource, and finance should translate the decisions into implementable actions. Obviously, with the understanding that the strategy of organisational service culture was interdisciplinary, delineated by five basic principles are customer-centred, sequencing, evidencing, co-creative and holistic (Stickdorn & Schneider, 2010). Primarily, there must be a harmonised understanding of the perceived and expected service by the managers and employees in the ITO company of the needs of the customer creating a kind of same wavelength phenomenon before facing the customer. This presents a unique and unified corporate image of oneness in the eyes of the customer.

Once the service culture was internally established by the ITO, it paves the way for a hitch free service encounter with the customer. The described conceptual framework stipulates that there was an extant gap between the perceived and expected service from the ITO managers, employees and even their customers. Such a gap was first illustrated in the service quality conceptual gap model developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) earlier discussed in chapter 2 (section 2.2). Service quality literature was based on the customer's perception and expectation with little attention given to the service provider which in this study was the ITO manager and employee expectation and perception of service quality. It was the aim of this framework to seek to address these lapses. Based on the service encounter theory and triad (section 2.6) discussed in the literature review, it was understood that the customer was a co-creator and co-producer of a service just as much as the service provider (Suprenant & Solomon, 1987). During the dyadic exchange, maximum care must be taken by the ITO staff because the customer's position as the one receiving the service was viewed as prime and very important because of their uniqueness and personal characteristics.

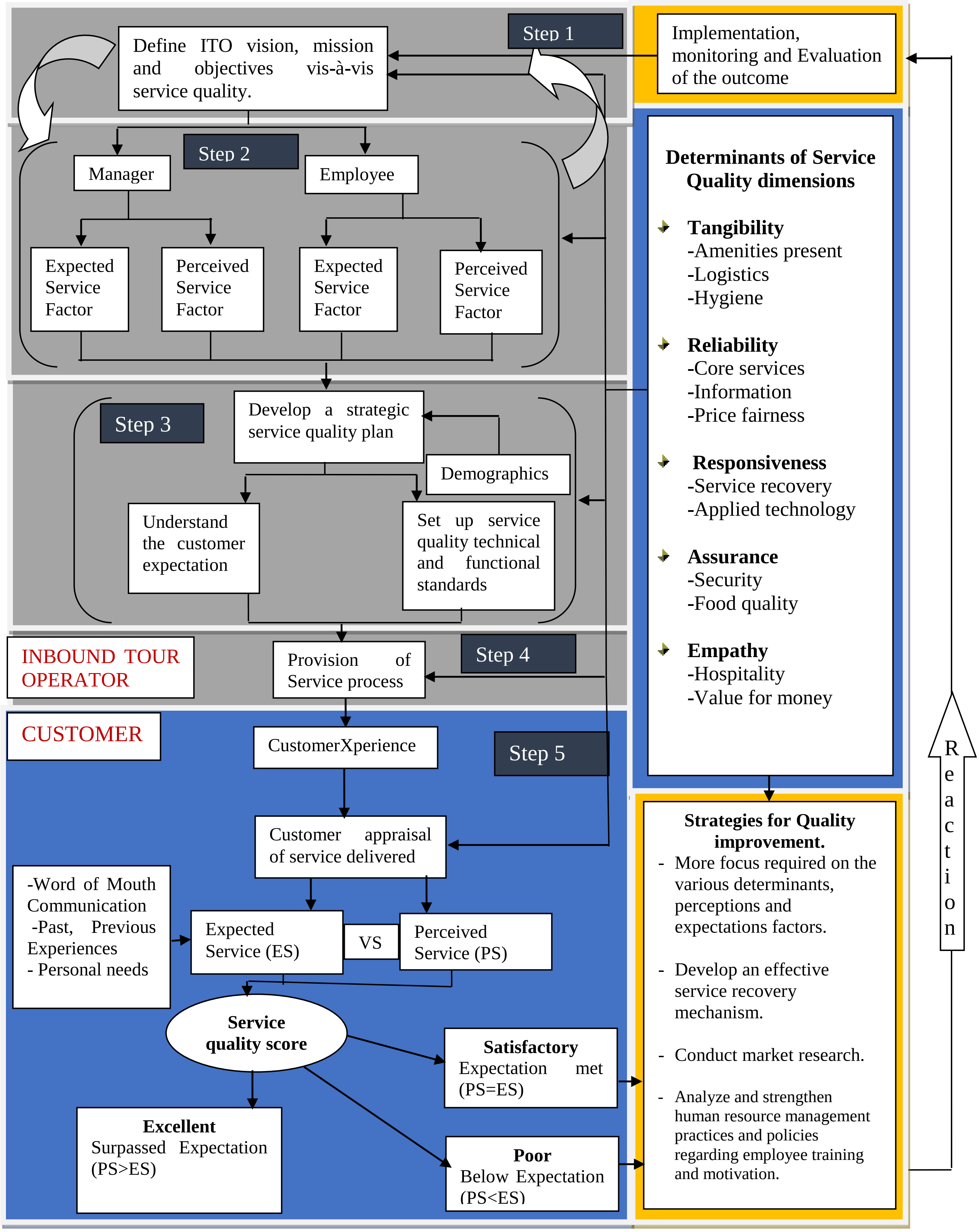
During the service encounter, the perception and expectation of service by the customer was being aligned with that of the ITO (manager and employee) (Ma & Dube, 2011). By this, the specific needs of the customer are taken care of and this leaves flashes of good memories and a positive experience in the mind of the customer. Hence, the relationship between the ITO employees and managers (service provider) and customer (service receiver) strengthens the service encounter process and the outcome was a positive customer experience.

Literature on service quality determinants points out that they are unique to each service industry (Carman, 1990; Zhao et al., 2002; Cunningham & Young, 2002). It was envisaged that at the end of this study, a set of service quality determinants unique to the ITO would confirm what was found in literature on the specificity of different service industries. From the conceptual framework presented, it was understood that the stakeholders' (managers, employees, and customers) perceptions and expectations of service have an effect on service quality determinants.

As highlighted in the literature review, the service quality assessment was a concept that has undergone numerous adaptations and modifications in different contexts and industries. Summarily, in all these modifications, it could be generally concluded that to obtain excellent service quality, the service perception must exceed the service expectations. For this to happen in the TO industry, the ITO should and must identify the various determinants unique to its industry that affect all the stakeholders which form part of the objectives of this research. The conceptual framework presented would act as a guiding tool towards achieving the research objectives which globally was to bring about excellent service quality in the TO industry in Cameroon.

5.5 PROPOSED OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK

The operational framework was the underlying network and connection of ideas and variables and how they all come/work together to achieve the objectives of this study. This operational framework was the basis on which lies the whole research. Figure 25 illustrates, through a visual representation the various variables, links, stages, and connections identified in the conceptual framework.



Step 1
Define ITO vision, mission and objectives vis-à-vis service quality.
Implementation, monitoring and Evaluation of the outcome
Step 2
Manager
Employee
Expected Service Factor
Perceived Service Factor
Expected Service Factor
Perceived Service Factor
Step 3
Develop a strategic service quality plan
Demographics
Understand the customer expectation
Set up service quality technical and functional standards
INBOUND TOUR OPERATOR
Provision of Service process
Step 4
CUSTOMER
CustomerXperience
Step 5
Customer appraisal of service delivered
-Word of Mouth Communication
-Past, Previous Experiences
- Personal needs
Expected Service (ES)
VS
Perceived Service (PS)
Service quality score
Satisfactory
Expectation met (PS=ES)
Excellent
Surpassed Expectation (PS>ES)
Poor
Below Expectation (PS<ES)
Determinants of Service Quality dimensions
Tangibility
-Amenities present
-Logistics
-Hygiene
Reliability
-Core services
-Information
-Price fairness
Responsiveness
-Service recovery
-Applied technology
Assurance
-Security
-Food quality
Empathy
-Hospitality
-Value for money
Strategies for Quality improvement.
- More focus required on the various determinants, perceptions and expectations factors.
- Develop an effective service recovery mechanism.
- Conduct market research.
- Analyze and strengthen human resource management practices and policies regarding employee training and motivation.
Reaction

Figure 25: Proposed Operational framework
Source: Author's elaboration based on extant literature

The proposed operational framework provides a vivid outline of the independent and dependent variables identified in this study and shows how they are interlinked with each other within the framework.

Step one kicks off with the establishment of the vision, mission and objectives laid out within the service provider organisational strategic management plan which lays down the groundwork for the establishment and development of a service culture (chapter 2.5) necessary for achieving excellent service quality. Kit-Fai and Ka-Yan (2001:239) define strategic orientation as "cooperate vision, guiding principles and quality strategies." This was a major and powerful point of departure for any / every service organisation such as the TOs as weakness in this plan will affect the whole system. This sets the ball rolling for an effective and successful service quality provision and delivery process.

The second step would examine the expectation and perception service factors (chapter 2.3) of the ITO's managers and employees. According to the Gap model (Oliver 1980) described in chapter 2 (2.3) of the literature review, the contrast between the perception and expectation must be identified because it was what enabled assessments to be conducted by the organisation. In this step, a survey with both the managers and employees would be conducted to get their knowledge level of the topic under investigation. These factors will aid to give a clearer picture as to how the ITO's stakeholders approach the topic of excellent service quality.

According to Parasuraman et al. (1985), this helps to improve on the organisational service concept (2.4) which was the way in which an organisation would wish its staff perceive the service offer. It was worth noting that phase one and two relate with each other within the internal dynamics of the organisation as a better understanding of the expectations and perceptions of ITO's managers and employees will boost the establishment of a much better tailored strategic orientation plan (Ooi Mei et al., 1991:141) presented in the vision, mission, and objectives (step 1) of the company.

The third step develops a strategic plan for service quality (Goldstein et al., 2002). This phase comprises three points; understanding demographics, determining the customer expectation, and setting up of the technical and functional standards of service quality within the ITO. The technical point centres around "what" the customer gets (tools and technologies) meanwhile the functional standards focus around "how" the customer receives the service (Grönroos, 1984). The demographic elements (e.g., age, gender) of the customer are very important component in drawing up a strategic and marketing plan so that the service was geared towards correctly profiling the right customer (Suuroja, 2003:13). This point will be applied during the data collection stage on the field. For this study, the following individual attributes would be considered: physical appearance, attitude and mood, level of attention given and level of understanding (Lehtinen & Lehtinen, 1991).

Step four involved the process of service provision which was the human-to-human interaction involving an encounter between the service provider and receiver (Kotler *et al*., 2014:47). During this phase there are several external factors that come into play such as the external stimulus (competition from others, socio-cultural structure, communication), marketing (publicity and advertisements, public relations, sales promotions, price) and ITO's corporate image (Felix, 2017:4).

Step five was about the customer experience (see chapter 3) when the employees are guided by the customer (Gazzoli et al., 2013). It takes off with the service encounter (see chapter 2.6) in a transitional process from the ITO service provider to the customer. In this step, the customer service-employee interaction was highlighted and comes under review of the customer service quality assessment. Particularly for this research, the following variables would be considered: (1) the response of employees to specific customer needs; (2) response of employee to service delivery failure and (3) employee proactive and innovative nature (Bitner, Booms & Tetreault, 1990). The ITO must control the encounter with a critical eye in order to obtain the desired results (Solomon et al., 1985). After the encounter, the customer makes an appraisal comparing the service received against the service perceived (Parasuraman et al., 1985). This appraisal could lead to either one of the three service quality conclusions: good (perceived service exceeds expectations), satisfactory (perceived service equals expectations) and poor (perceived service was below expectations) (Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons, 2006:108).

For the last two options (satisfactory and poor service scores), there was a need for the ITO to take necessary measures to improve service quality as stated in the [ISO (TC) 176] delivered which was reinserted or readjusted in a feedback process into the organisation's policies and strategic set up (ISO, 2017; Fonseca, 2015:173). According to Mak (2011), some of the reasons advanced by TOs to be ISO 9000 certified included creating a solid corporate image, obtain better promotion and adverts, standardise all the different departments, better operational knowledge, examine the operational manual, better management, and empower the actions of hierarchy to make valuable changes. Considering these constructs properly will enable the ITO and other tourism and hospitality structures enjoy good corporate image, repeat purchase from new and retained customers, increased sales and more profit generated (Hagan, 2015:16). The next paragraph will present a review of this chapter.

5.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 5 of this study examined the proposed research framework based on extant literature. It addressed the following secondary objectives outlined in chapter one: evaluate the effects of customer service quality expectation on service quality in the ITO industry; examine the effects of customer service quality perception on service quality in the ITO industry; and determine the influence of customer service experience on service quality in the ITO industry. This chapter began with a brief introduction presenting what a conceptual framework was and discussing the conceptual framework for this study. According to Fisher (2007), it should be a clearly elucidated writing indicating the relationship of the concepts outlined and how they aid to answer the research problem of the study. The next paragraph dwelled on a discussion of the ITO products and services which basically are intermediary between service suppliers such as airlines, restaurants, ground transport, and customers.

Also examined in this chapter were the major service quality theories which included the TO service quality evaluation model and the SERVQUAL model which will serve as adapter guides to the development of the ITOSQUAL model specific to ITOs. The proposed conceptual and research hypotheses key to this study was elaborated and the operational frameworks on which this empirical study would be based. It was believed that the proposed research framework, the ITOSQUAL model, capitalized on extant literature, would be a new direction for ITOs to guarantee excellent service quality for a successful TO industry in Cameroon.

PART 3: TESTING AND VALIDATION OF THE PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

CHAPTER 6

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter on research methodology described the empirical investigation of this study which discussed on the philosophy of pragmatism as the philosophical underpinning and the mixed method research design also called the third research paradigm (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004:15) was equally applied in this study. The deductive research approach applied in this study was also examined. The principal research instruments discussed in this study included, an online survey questionnaire for the quantitative data collection (section 6.5) and an in-depth semi-structured interview for qualitative data collection (section 6.8); the sampling methods used and their criteria were equally examined. Measures to ensure reliability and validity measurement of data were then discussed in section 6.6.2. Just before the end of the chapter, discussions on research ethics ensued in section 6.9 and the chapter ended with a summary (section 6.10).

This study identified as problem the general feeling of dissatisfaction of customers in the TO industry owing to poor quality service delivery by ITOs in Cameroon. Hence, to address the problem, the following research objectives were set for this study:

I. To explore the major determinants of service quality as perceived by experts in the ITO industry;
II. To identify the dynamics between service quality expectation and service quality perception as viewed by Cameroon TO industry experts;
III. To identify the service quality determinant factors unique to the ITO industry;

IV. To understand the concept of service quality from the approach of ITO stakeholders (managers, employees and customers); and

V. To measure the ITO stakeholder's expectations against perceptions of service quality from an empirical viewpoint.

The research methodology section of this study described the different scientific methods or techniques applied and implemented, aimed at empirically investigating/testing and validating the suggested/elaborated service quality evaluation framework for the ITO industry in Cameroon. This research was conducted in four parts as illustrated by the methodological procedure diagram including the various chapters outlined below.

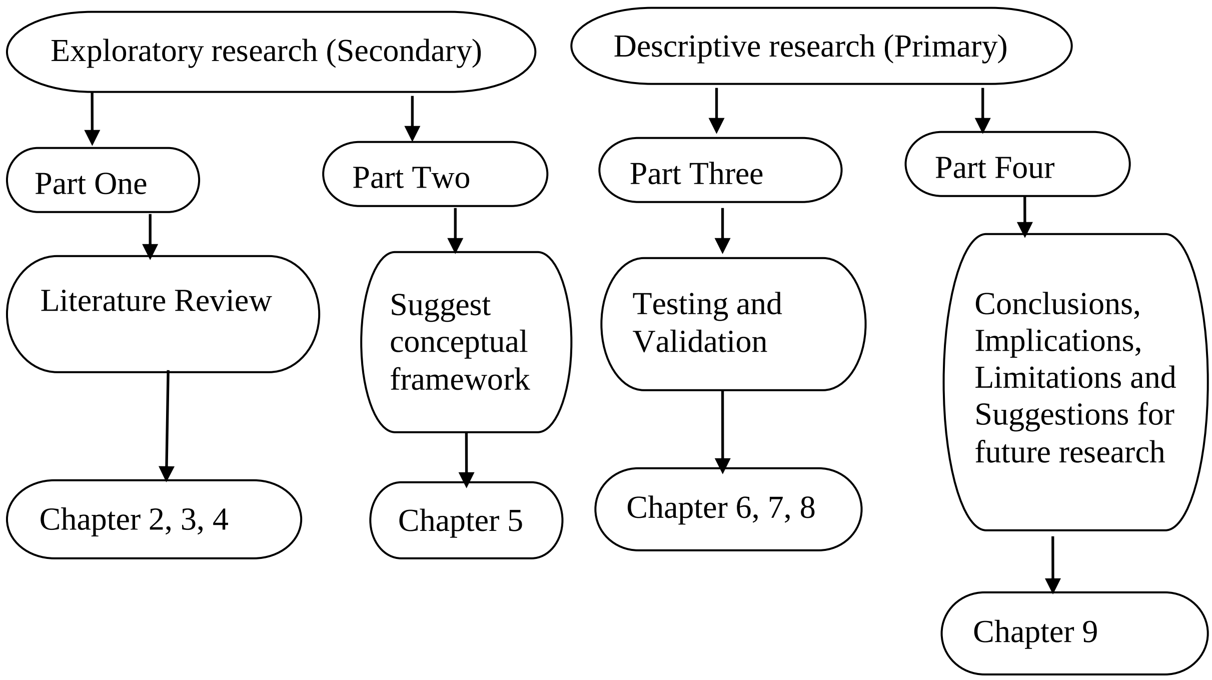


Figure 26: Presentation of methodology procedure including chapter outline used for this study

According to figure 26, part 1 and 2 referred to the exploratory research stage comprising the use of secondary data sources such as extant journal articles from previous studies on topics related to this study under investigation. The information sourced was used to prepare and write the literature review which was presented in chapter 2, 3 and 4. Chapter 2 elaborated on the understanding of service and service quality and its related arguments from previous studies. Chapter 3 focused on the customer experience. As in any service-oriented industry it is often said the customer is the king. Chapter 4 discussed the different service quality evaluation tools and instruments captured in existing literature. The information sourced was also used to suggest and develop a conceptual framework for this study which was presented in chapter 5. Part three of this study constituted testing and validation of the conceptual framework suggested in chapter 5 that helped to respond to this study's objectives outlined in chapter one.

Part three consisted of chapter 6, 7 and 8 representing the methodological, sampling and collection of data techniques which were presented in chapter 6. Chapter 6 mainly focused on the sequential explanatory mixed method research design chosen for this study. The chapter started with the methodological procedure for the collection of the quantitative data whose results were used to prepare the research instrument for the collection of the qualitative data.

Chapter 7 presented the section on the analysis of the quantitative data and research findings obtained. Particularly, the quantitative analysis dwelled on descriptive statistics and demographic information of the respondents, dimension reduction analysis, and test of parametric assumptions.

Chapter 8 presented the analysis of the qualitative data and research findings obtained. The analysis was based on descriptive statistics of the respondents and findings of the grounded theory was also discussed. The chapter concluded with the presentation of the service quality path model as the proposed model developed for this study.

Chapter 9 represented part four of the dissertation. The chapter consisted of the conclusions, implications, limitations and suggestions for future research. The conclusions involved a presentation of the main findings obtained and discussions on the implications of the findings on the study and a presentation of the limitations encountered during the study. The chapter concluded with some suggestions emanating from the limitations identified in the study, as possible avenues for future research.

6.2 RESEARCH PARADIGMS, PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS AND APPLICATION

The section below provided an overview and reasons that justified the use of the chosen research paradigm of pragmatism.

6.2.1 Research Philosophy: Pragmatism

According to Stainton (2018), "the philosophical underpinnings referred to in any study, groups all the viewpoints that talk about the reality checks under investigation". The research philosophy was composed of two themes:

I. Ontology: What is valid knowledge and how it was obtained; and

II. Epistemology: What is reality and how can it be understood (Stainton, 2018).

For the sake of research, there are two principal positions assumed when it comes to research philosophy, namely: positivism and interpretivism.

Positivism involves empirically testing and promoting the idea of experimentation to generate a new theoretical assumption that lays down all facts that together produces laws (Greener, 2008:16). Meanwhile interpretivism, according to Collins (2010), was a research philosophy that connects with the idealistic position, which brings in a group of various viewpoints including hermeneutics, phenomenology and social constructivism. These methods oppose objectivism that there was meaning in the world independent of consciousness.

Previous studies on service quality relied on these two philosophical approaches of positivism and interpretivism as illustrated by some researchers. According to Remmenyi, Williams, Money and Swartz (1998:32), working with a social reality that was observable and the end product of its research findings generalised into laws. According to Saunders et al. (2009:16), the application of some ideologies including practical research theories did not give the best reflection as it losed on deep enriching insights owing to over simplifications. In a related study on service quality framework for the hospitality industry in Botswana by Musikavahnu (2017:108), the researcher stated that it was therefore important to have a mix of both the positivism (objective facts) and interpretivism (subjective facts) stand points in the same study. According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998), applying positivism and interpretivism in one study could otherwise be called pragmatism which enabled the researcher to get a complete or holistic view. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003: ix) referred to pragmatism as the third methodological movement which was commonly used and recognised by researchers in the field of management.

This study used some information from previous literature that was contextualised via the use of empirical research. According to Ruwhiu and Cone (2010:113), some researchers are of the opinion that pragmatism focused and used information in a contextualised way. Equally, pragmatism was capable of repositioning theories such that it provided a solution to a challenge plaguing the society. Since the study on service quality needed a deeper human understanding, hence it required that both the positivist and interpretative philosophies which in the case of this study was the pragmatic philosophy was applied to achieve the aim. In a bit to understand the main aim of pragmatism which applied both positivism and interpretivism in a study, Powel (2002:884) indicated that pragmatism existed to solve real societal problems and not to argue who was right or wrong. Hence, in the light of this study under investigation, whose research problem was identified as poor service quality delivery in the ITO industry, the pragmatism philosophy was applied to understand the stakeholders' perspective on service quality in Cameroon's ITO industry.

According to the ontological worldview, pragmatism was a relatively new philosophy compared to positivism and interpretivism and applied theories that aided in identifying a solution to a said problem. Pragmatism was considered as an alternative competition to the other two philosophies of positivism and interpretivism (Pansiri, 2005:196). Based on previous related studies discussed in the literature review and considering the aim of this study which was to model an effective and efficient service quality framework for the ITO industry within the context of the Cameroon, adopting the pragmatic philosophy and applying a mixed methodology was ideal for achieving the research objectives of this research.

6.3 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design was an outline used to achieve the research objectives in a study (Cooper & Schindler, 2014:82; Kumar, 2011:94). A research design is also defined as a grand approach plan (a skeletal structure for the collection of data and its analysis) to a research topic (Greener, 2008:38). Such a plan is presented in a schematic or visual way such as the Saunders' research onion.

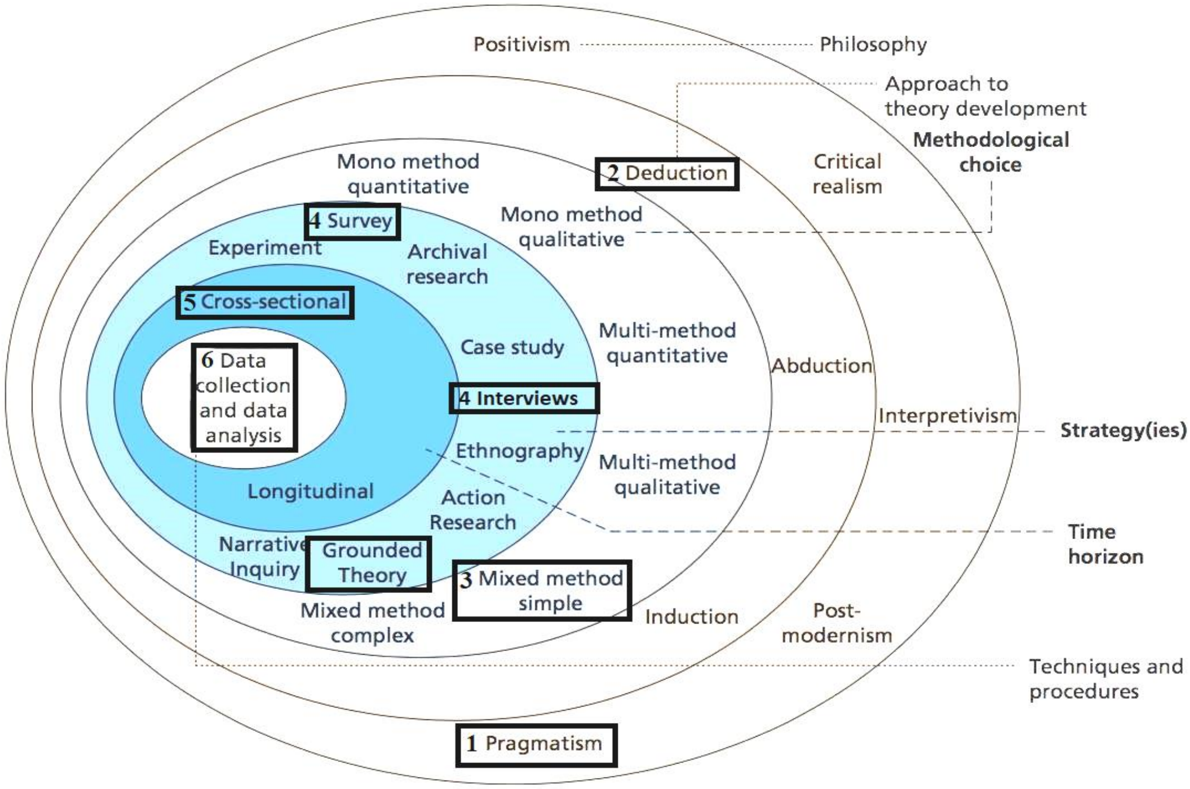


Figure 27: Saunders Research Onion
Source: Adapted from Saunders et al. (2016:124)

Developed in 2007 by Saunders et al., the research onion was used to explain the steps a researcher follows to effectively develop an appropriate methodology in any study. To allow for maximum credibility of the researcher's work, vivid explanations to justify why the researcher choose a particular method over another must be clearly provided at each decision level of the methodology. Basically, the research onion was like an ordinary onion with various layers beginning from the outside going towards the core inside.

Bryman (2012) described the horizon as the needed timeframe to complete a project. According to Saunders' (2007) research onion, the time horizon considered for this study was cross sectional. Such a time zone like the one considered for this study involved researching a phenomenon occurring during a specific period and during which considerable data must be collected. In this study, the phenomenon under investigation was that of service quality evaluation in the ITO industry in Cameroon.

6.3.1 The deductive approach

Looking at the focus of the research from the organisational perspective or as a business problem, through an investigation using mixed method research aimed at developing a model (Greener 2008:16), the deductive approach was used in this study. Deduction is "the human process of moving from the known to the unknown" (Spangler, 1986:101). The researcher in this approach must draw some kind of a conclusion, then empirically conduct the study to affirm the findings whether it was correct or not (Musikavanhu, 2017). Silver (2013) asserted that this approach led to a hypothesis development that was based on all ready extant theory which was then tested through the research approach. According to Snieder and Larner (2009), the deductive approach was said to be the most convenient to the positivist approach that allowed for the hypothesis to be formed and the expectant results of the statistical testing presented and accepted to a certain level of probability. The properties of the deductive approach included developing a specific idea from the general information; establishing base line information, outline the general concept, then the particular knowledge acquired from the process tested (Kothari, 2004). Besides using the deductive approach in a quantitative study, it could also be applied in a qualitative study except that the expectations from already existing information were formulated in another fashion (Saunders et al., 2007). Questionnaires were used in a deductive approach to generate understanding, which allowed for comparison of ideas from the different participants through the empirical data. The data collected helped to confirm or reject the research question.

6.3.2 The Mixed Method

The research strategy was simply a description of the way the research will be prepared and carried out by the researcher (Saunders et al., 2007). From the choice of the research philosophy adopted in the previous sub-section and based on previous literature explained in chapter two, the most appropriate methodology for this study was the mixed methodology that involved the quantitative and qualitative data sets, particularly the sequential explanatory research approach. The mixed methods approach was among the finest and one of the most applied research strategies because it resulted in the collection of vast, rich and reliable data (Saunders et al., 2007). The choice of the mixed method was because of its ability to create a precise and unique data set. The mixed methodology involved a quantitative phase whose research strategy of collecting primary data was through techniques like survey/questionnaire.

Surveys were mostly used to observe various variables among the different data (Saunders et al., 2007). The goal of the quantitative phase in this study was to identify the SERVQUAL model factors and dimensions that were appropriately used to measure customer perception and performance to bring about improved quality service and quality management in the ITO industry in Cameroon. The findings from the quantitative methodology data sampling, collection and analysis were used to establish and develop the interview guide and protocol to be used during the qualitative analysis phase. The qualitative data collection was through in-depth semi structured interviews technique with tourism experts based in Cameroon who had above five years' experience in the industry. For this study, the interviews helped to provide more answers and clarity where there seemed to be ambiguities in the quantitative phase. After examining both phases, the process of triangulation and integration of both data sets took place to provide a unified research result. Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie (2003) outlined a seven-step procedure for the analysis in a mixed method research which included:

I. Reduction of data involved dimensionality reduction of both qualitative and quantitative data sets.
II. Display of data included a visual representation of the qualitative and quantitative data.
III. Transformation of the data was about the quality and quantity of the data.
IV. Correlation of the data included developing a relationship or link between both data sets.
V. Consolidation of the data involved joining both the quantitative and qualitative data to bring about new variables.
VI. Comparison of the data included comparing both sources of data.
VII. Integration of the data was about mixing the quantitative and qualitative data into one coherent and comprehensive whole. (Onwuegbuzie & Combs 2011:5; Greene, 2007:55).

The mixed method approach gained much ground in the social sciences and was existing in field research for over 100 years. Mixed methods research became increasingly common in the two decades that have ensued and continues to expand both theoretically and practically (Greg et al., 2012:187). The mixed method was used to study a range of management topics as it allowed and promoted inventiveness among research scientists (Uma & Pansiri, 2011:698). According to Uma et al. (2011:698), it was crucial that Doctor of Philosophy

(PhD) students understood how to apply the quantitative and qualitative approaches in their studies so as to have a clearer and better understanding of research in the field of management. Besides, the mixed method assisted doctoral level students to have a good mastery of the different techniques to collect, analyse and interpret information collected in the field which was more reliable and credible for the understanding of a research problem deeper.

In research studies, a referral research design in the social sciences was the adoption of the mixed methods design. A mixed methods design was a technique that involved collecting, analysing and integrating both the quantitative data and the qualitative data within the same study aimed at exploring the research problem to obtain a clearer comprehension (Creswell 2005; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

6.3.3 Sequential Explanatory Mixed Method

According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003), there were approximately 40 mixed methods designs which were extensively discussed in extant literature (Moghaddam, Walker, & Harre 2003; Creswell, 2003; 2005). It was equally acknowledged that the designs applied in many studies included the three sequential and concurrent mixed methods designs (Creswell et al., 2003). Therefore, for this study the justification for adopting the mixed methods design included obtaining the quantitative data set and analysing it to generally understand the problem of poor service quality within the ITO industry in Cameroon under investigation while collecting and analysing the qualitative data set explained the numerical outcome through the explanation of the different views of the participants (Creswell, 2005; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Hence, for this study, the sequential explanatory mixed method research design was judged by the researcher as appropriate to be applied.

In this study, the mixed methods explanatory sequential procedure was shown in Table 22. This helped provide a visual of the research data collection sequence, the priority of different methods and the point(s) of connection between the two phases. According to Creswell et al. (2003, 2005) and Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998), existing literature therefore indicated an extensive expatiated text on the application of a visual model in a mixed methods study. Some authors such as Morse (1991) introduced a classification of notation and expounding the mixed methods procedures. Hanson et al. (2005) provided a visual representation which was void of procedural guidelines.

Using Morse’s (1991) system of notation, Creswell et al. (2003) developed a ten-rule item for representing a visual model (Table 22). The intention behind this was to give to researchers applying the mixed methods design the practicality of the often-complicated design. These rules showed the steps to follow and offered specific guidelines that had to do with form and content. This visual model also aided the researcher to understand when, where and how to make necessary adjustments. It was also helpful to those who took interest in mixed methods study to understand what was going on.

Table 9: Adapted ten rules to illustrate a mixed methods design’s visual model.

- Title of the visual model.
- Define the layout of the model either as horizontal or vertical.
- Apply boxes for the collection, analysis and interpretation of the quantitative and qualitative data results.
- Capitalise or use lowercase letters to indicate priority of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis.
- Indicate flow of procedures by using single-headed arrows.
- State the procedure for collecting and analysing the quantitative and qualitative data.
- State the expected results or outcomes of the quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis procedure.
- Language to describe products and procedures should be concise.
- Model should be made simple.
- Model should be limited to one-page.

Source: Creswell et al. (2006:15)

Among researchers, the sequential explanatory mixed methods design was common and involved primarily the collection and analysis of the numerical (quantitative) data followed by the data in text (qualitative) in two successive phases within a research. Though this design was well-known and straightforward (Plano, 2011), it was not easy to implement as there were some methodological considerations that applied. According to Creswell et al. (2003), issues such as the level of priority or even weightage given to the quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis sequence; the stage where both data sets connect and the integration of the results of both data sets. Despite the advantages of using the sequential mixed methods design, it was worth noting that this design was limited in its lengthy timing and resource feasibility.

Based on the ten-rule illustration of the visual model of mixed methods design presented in the above table, Ivankova et al. (2006) fashioned a graphical representation of the sequential explanatory mixed method design as presented by Subedi (2017:574) in his study (see Figure 28). The model showed the sequence, indicated the priority and specified the procedures for collecting and analysing the data shortlisting the outcome at every stage within the study. The model indicated the areas of connection between the two phases and showed at what level data integration was taking place.

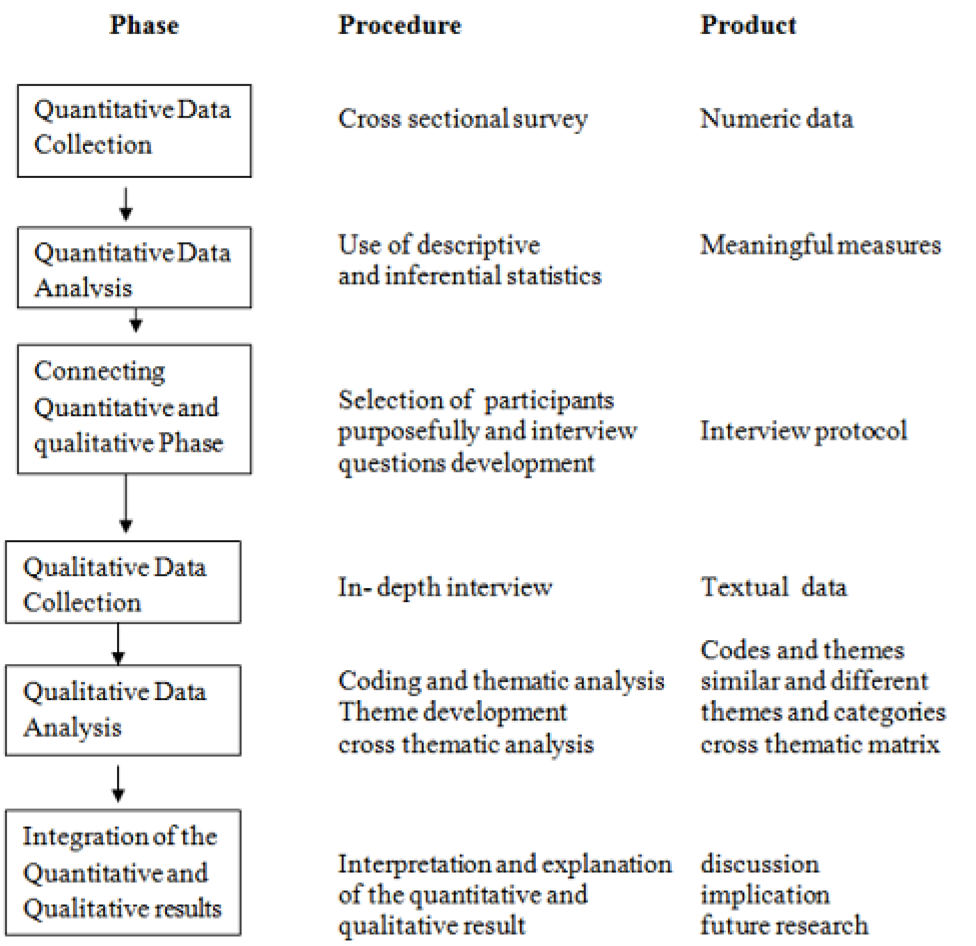


Figure 28: Phase, procedure and product in a sequential explanatory mixed method design
Source: Subedi, 2017:574

In the explanatory sequential mixed method design, the researcher in this study connected the quantitative and qualitative phases as he selected respondents (through in-depth semi-structured interviews with tourism professionals) for the qualitative data collection and the analysis was based on the outcome of the quantitative section (Creswell et al., 2003). In this study, another connecting point was when developing the interview protocol for collecting the qualitative data after obtaining the results from the collection and analysis of the quantitative data to further explain the results. The data sets were collected sequentially (Harwell 2011:154) meaning, the quantitative data was collected first and its findings used to further explain the qualitative data results to complement and provide a more holistic answer to the achievement of the research questions. That was sequential quantitative-qualitative analysis (Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2011:4) (see Figure 29). Equal priority and status were given to the qualitative and the quantitative analysis components (Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2011:5). Also, this research design would help to erase unavoidable method biases, balance and strengthen any method weaknesses and leverage on inbuilt strengths of the method (Greene, 2007: xiii) and provide a more comprehensive and convincing evidence.

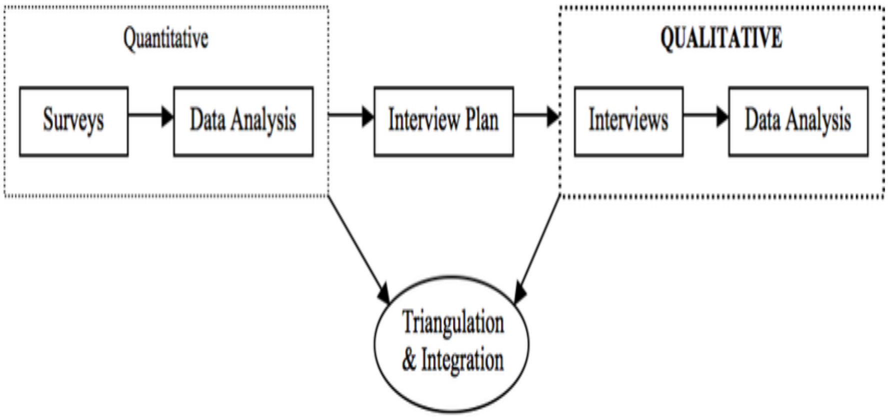


Figure 29: Sequential Explanatory Mixed Method Design
Sources: Adaptation from Creswell (2003); Pansiri (2005: 202)

Adopting a mixed method was very relevant to this study on service quality assessment because using both the quantitative and qualitative approaches to collect and analyse data of ITO service quality evaluation was to increase confidence level in the data sets, create innovative ways of understanding the topic under investigation and reveal unique findings. This was to provide a clearer picture of the research problem (Darfoon, 2013) so that an appropriate evaluation framework for ITOs was suggested.

6.4 DESIGN OF THE SAMPLING PLAN

The sampling plan design explored the study location. It was the site where the study was conducted. This took into cognisance the sample area, sample population involved in the study. The section that follows would delve into the geography of the sample population of this study.

6.4.1 Geographical location of the study

Cameroon is located between West and Central Africa in the Gulf of Guinea. It shares borders with Nigeria, Chad, Central African Republic (CAR), Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon. There are many local languages spoken but the official languages are French and English (Kimbu, 2012). Two of the ten regions are English speaking [Anglophone] (the northwest and southwest regions that border Nigeria) while the remaining eight regions of the country are French speaking [Francophone]. It is rich and diversified in its touristic ecosystem, vast floral and faunal diversity and density put the country in a strategic location as a tourism hub to the rest of the world. In fact, Cameroon has one of the highest concentrations of endemic species on the African continent apart from the island of Madagascar and was in this regard classified by the World Bank and the World Wide Fund (WWF) as one of the 13 countries worldwide with the highest amount of biological diversity (Riley & Riley, 2005). Presently, Cameroon has 13 national parks, three of which were UNESCO-MAB biosphere reserves and one a UNESCO World Heritage Site; 18 wildlife reserves, three wildlife sanctuaries, 16 forest reserves and protected areas, nine cloud (mountain) forest sites in the country covering a total land surface area of about 472,710 km^2 (182,514 sq. miles) (MINTOUL, 2020) as seen in the tourism map of Cameroon (Figure 30). This is in addition to the 402 km of coastline with pristine beaches near the foot of Mount Cameroon in Limbe of the South West region, at the entrance of the equatorial forest around Kribi and Campo of the South region and on the island of Manoka in the Littoral region (MINTOUL, 2020). In addition, the country is blessed with a diversity and multiplicity of cultures, customs and traditions manifested in the more than 270 ethnic groups' spoken languages, architecture, dressing, music, song and dancing especially in the western and northern regions of Cameroon (Benneh, 2008; Paden & Soya, 1970). The ethnic groups are distributed as such, Cameroon Highlanders 31%, Equatorial Bantu 19%, Kirdi 11%, Fulani 10%, Northwestern Bantu 8%, Eastern Nigritic 7%, other African 13%, and non-African less than 1% (Kimbu, 2012).

Tourism in Cameroon is shaped by its history, land, economic and socio-cultural traditions. Cameroon is one of the developing countries in the world; full of natural scenes and tourist attractions but owing to deficiency of resources, it is unable to completely benefit from these natural gifts. Cameroon is a land of tourist attractions, for lovers of adventure and culture including mountains, lakes and seaside resort. Like most African countries, Cameroon stands out with an unaffected identity uttering diversity and stability, modernity and traditions, dynamism and calm (Fofang, 2014). Cameroon concentrates all the beauties of Africa which explains why people ponder that nobody can discover Africa without having visited Cameroon. Reason for the slogan “All of Africa in one Nation” adopted by the Ministry of Tourism and Leisure, Cameroon.

Figure 30 : Cameroon Tourism Map

Source: Mapsland

The eastern, western and southern parts of Cameroon (North West, South West, Littoral, Centre, South and East Regions) are potential havens for ecotourism, mountaineering and hiking, cultural and beach tourism development while the northern part of Cameroon (Adamaoua, North and Extreme North regions) is the mecca for safari adventurers and is the most visited part of the country (Kimbu, 2010).

Cameroon has rich and abundant cultural and natural diversity, different forms of cultural and environmentally sustainable benefits from nature related tourism, mountaineering and hiking, sun and sea tourism initiatives. These are geared to promote local economic development and were starting to understand something clearly at last around some parks and sites of interest and could be developed in the other sites if the necessary planning, management and monitoring tools which would facilitate hard and soft infrastructure development and management were put in place (Kimbu, 2012).

6.4.2 Tourism's contribution to Cameroon's economy

Tourism stands out as an important contributor to Cameroon's economy and even to the Central African Monetary and Economic Community (CEMAC) sub-region. According to Cameroon tourism statistics, there was an increase in tourism revenue since 2015. In 2017, 543 million US dollars (representing a 6.89% increase) was generated; 2016 recorded 508 million US dollars (representing a 6.72% increase); 2015 recorded 476 million US dollars (representing a 24.32% decrease). According to the latest statistics from the world tourism organisation on the worlddata.info website, revenue generated from tourism in Cameroon in 2018 amounted to 681 million US dollars in receipts alone corresponding to a 1.7% increase of the GDP of the country and 63% of all international tourism receipts in the central African sub-region. Back in 1995, tourism revenue was just 75 million US dollars approximately 0.78% of the gross national product (GNP) but steadily increased within the past 24 years.

According to the 2015 annual statistics report from the Cameroon National Institute of Statistics, the chart of tourism businesses reveals that in 2011 the centre (Yaoundé) and littoral (Douala) each had about 21% of hotel businesses in Cameroon. The East and Adamaoua regions tailed the queue with 5% and 3% respectively. Concerning restauration, the littoral led with 35% followed by the Centre with 23% and South with 12%. The South West region with abundant natural resources had the least percentage in terms of restaurant with 1% in Cameroon. About tourist's arrivals in Cameroon, a general increase was observed of 59.2% no matter the mode of transport between 2010 and 2013. In 2013, the transport mode most used by tourists was road (54.1%) followed by air transport (43.6%) and maritime transport (2.3%). Also recorded was a steady increase from 2006 to 2018 of the number of international tourist's arrivals to Cameroon via air transport. According to the World Bank (2021), the country in 2006 recorded 477 000 international tourists and in 2018 recorded 997 000 international tourists up from the 1.081 000 tourists recorded in 2017 within its national borders ranking third in the Central African sub-region and 173rd in the world (WTO, 2021).

Following a joint study conducted by MINTOUL and the Ministry of Finance by the end of August 2013, it was recorded that Cameroon had 539 hotels with a total capacity of 15 012 rooms, 330 suites and 269 apartments. There were 377 restaurants, 96 leisure businesses, 213 travel agencies and 199 tourist guides. Concerning the respect of international norms and standards, 177 businesses were in conformity. According to the National Institute of Statistics (Annual Statistics report, 2015) in 2014, Cameroon had 579 tourism businesses. These included essentially, 353 one-star hotels, 132 two-star hotels, 47 three-star hotels, four four-star hotels, 1 five-star hotels and 399 non-classified hotels. In 2017, the national technical commission for the approval of tourism businesses in Cameroon issued 50 authorisations for the opening and functioning of 22 hotels, four restaurants and four travel agencies. It accorded 11 tourism guide agreements (MINTOUL, 2019).

It should be noted that in Cameroon, the term 'travel agent' was used more generally, to refer to an organisation operating in the tourism industry offering airline flight reservation and sales services, hotel reservation, visa assistance or sale of tour packages. Members of the national syndicate of travel agencies are IATA-accredited most of whom are based in Douala and Yaoundé. However, Yaoundé has over a total of 92 travel agencies including non-IATA accredited agencies and clandestine agencies with no licence or agreement to operate (Mintoul, 2018). According to the Cameroon tourism code (Law no 2016/006 of 18 April 2016 on tourist and leisure activities in Cameroon), there are three categories of travel agencies differentiated mainly by the kind of services offered and their financial backing.

I. Category I: Main services included flight reservation and ticketing; car rentals; excursions with a financial backing of five [5] million francs.
II. Category II: Main services included flight reservation and ticketing; car rentals and hotel reservation with a financial ten [10] million francs.

III. Category III (Tour operator) Main services included selling tour packages; flight reservation and ticketing; car rentals and hotel reservation with a financial backing of 15 million francs.

Tour operators within the tourism industry value chain in Cameroon and in SSA are key players who act as important “connectors” (AFTFP, 2010:6) and intermediaries between service providers (airlines, hotels, car dealers etc.) and the customers. Their role essentially is the sales of hotel facilities, restoration, picks and drops and leisure activities all combined into a tour package (USAID, 2007:5) prepared by the TO. ITOs in Cameroon and along the tourism value chain occupy and play a vital role as the principal retailers of touristic products and services of destination Cameroon.

6.4.3 Target population: Quantitative phase

According to the World Population Review (2021), Cameroon is the 52nd most populous country in the world. The country was sparsely populated, however, with just 56 people per square kilometre (145/square mile), Cameroon is ranked 167th in the world. The urbanisation rate is currently 3.3% as 56.3% of the country is urbanised and that percentage continues to grow annually. Cameroon's population is estimated at 27,218,694 in 2021 (World Population Review, 2021) up substantially from the 2002 census population of 17.4 million. Cameroon’s demographic profile for 2021 gives an estimated population of 1 299 369 inhabitants who live in the capital city of Yaoundé while Douala which is the economic capital and major trade hub for central Africa has an estimated population of 1 338 082 (World Population Review, 2021). By the statistics presented above, Yaoundé (Centre) is the second largest city in Cameroon after Douala (Littoral) (see Figure 31).

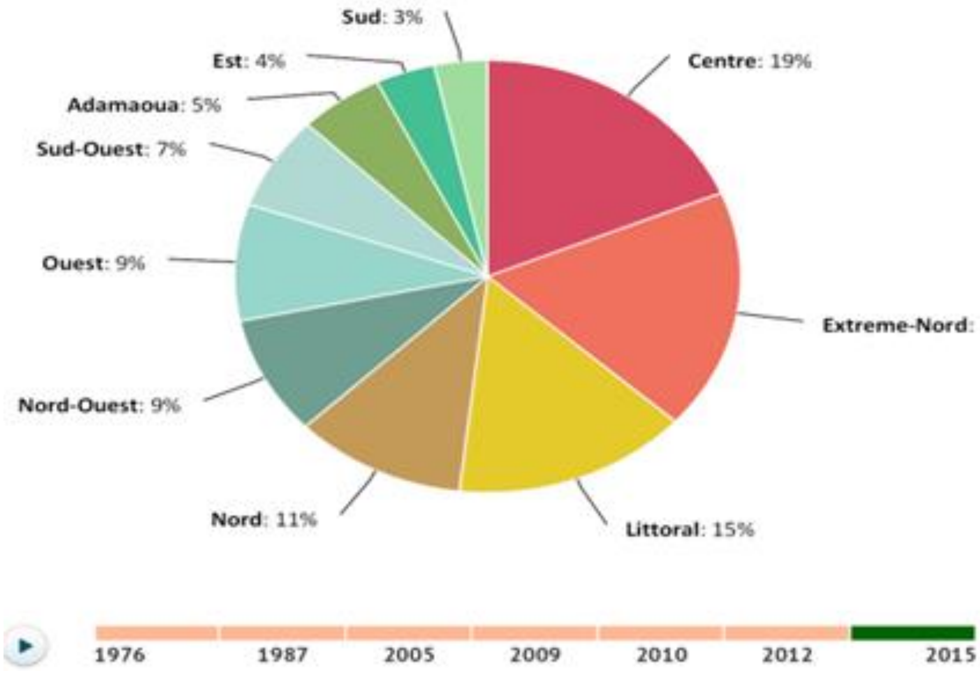


Figure 31: Cameroon's Percentage distribution of Population by Region
Source: World Population Review (2017)

The age structure of the population of Cameroon was divided into five categories as presented below. From the statistics, it shows that the youthful population from 15 years to 54 years in Cameroon made up the majority of the active population.

Table 10: Age Structure of the Cameroon population

Age group (years)	% Population	Gender	
		Male	Female
0-14	42.78	5,115,958	5,039,122
15-24	19.58	2,337,061	2,310,178
25-54	30.53	3,644,779	3,603,610
55-64	3.96	458,001	481,717
65 and over	3.15	348,754	400,038

Source: World Population Review (2021)

According to Malhotra (2015:272) and Kumar (2011:193), the sample population of any study was the collection of information the researcher sought from a defined group from which inferences and conclusions are made. For this study, the target population involved human participants, persons aged 18-65 years that either own or were working for / in an ITO company for at least two years and living in the cities of Douala and Yaoundé forming group 1. Group 2 participants included persons (here termed customers) aged 18-65 years consuming any of the products or services of an ITO for at least two years. The researcher considered that ITO customers could be resident within Cameroon or even abroad but this could not be determined by the researcher as confidentiality laws were applied to protect the interest of customers.

The arguments of this choice included:

I. Populated nature: The cities of Douala the economic capital and Yaoundé the political capital of Cameroon are the most populated cities in the country based on the statistical data presented above. These cities are most of the top tier hotels, restaurants and transportation facilities. The top shorts in the country live and work in these cities.
II. Accessibility to international port of entry: The Douala International Airport (IATA code DLA) and the Yaoundé Nsimalen International Airport (IATA code NSI) are the two air gateways for international travels into and out of Cameroon with a considerable amount of air traffic. It should be mentioned that there are other airports like the Garoua International Airport which was also an international airport and the Maroua Salak Airport which serves mostly local and chattered flights.
III. Most of the ITOs are based in these two cities: According to 2020 official statistics from Cameroon’s Ministry of Tourism and Leisure, there are about 33 major travel agencies certified by the International Air Transport Agency (IATA) situated in Douala and Yaoundé.
IV. Good transport network between both cities: The cities of Douala and Yaoundé have an advanced road infrastructure permitting for the smooth and fluid movement of persons and goods between the two cities within an estimate time of 4-5 hours.

Gaining access to the ITO businesses was not the easiest of tasks to carry out. During the COVID-19 period, according to UNISA COVID-19 research guidelines, very limited contact with human participants was highly recommended to be observed to the maximum during this period. Therefore, researcher contacted directly the selected ITO founder or General Manager via email and telephone calls to introduce the study and inquired to know if they were interested in participating in the study. For those that accepted and were available during the

COVID-19 period, the online questionnaire link was shared with them so that they would familiarize themselves with the questions. Permission was sought from them to share with their managers and other employees the online questionnaire links. Equally through the ITOs contact list which was not shared with the researcher for confidentiality sake, customers using ITO services were reached via the ITOs and the link to the online questionnaire were shared to them.

6.5 SAMPLING SELECTION METHOD

In any research, the sample size referred to the "number of elements to be included in a study" (Malhotra, 2015:274) and depended on some factors such as knowledge ability of the population under study; the study's objectives; research problem identified; finances made available and the time frame (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2010:165; McDaniel & Gates, 2012:276). Therefore, how to determine the sample size was a complex process which considered both practical and statistical considerations, including the following:

I. The sample population's variability level: as the population became more heterogeneous, so too was the sample size increased to understand the diversity.
II. The sample population's precision level: The more precision needed so too was the bigger the size required.
III. The sample population's confidence level: This indicated how certain the data collected characteristics was a representation of the sample population characteristics.
IV. Statistical data analysis to be used in the study – if advanced statistical techniques were required, the sample size should be larger.
V. The nature of the research – for exploratory research designs, the sample size was typically small, while for descriptive studies, larger samples are required.
VI. Resource constraints – the sample should be guided by a consideration of resources, such as time and money.
VII. The size of the targeted sample population: A scenario of normal distribution involved an increase in the sample size in absolute terms meaning the closer distribution. Such a connection was referred to as the central limit theorem (Malholtra, 2015:274; Saunders et al., 2016:279).

Considering the objective of this study, some researchers such as Cooper and Emory (1995:207) and Krejcie and Morgan (1970:608) suggested that the methodology used to determine the appropriate sample population in a study was required to be representative. According to Krejcie and Morgan (ibid), for a sample population of one million, the recommended size should be 384.

Recommendations regarding the sample size for the statistical data analysis to be used in the study were also considered. While there was little agreement among authors concerning how large a sample should be, when conducting a factor analysis, a larger sample size is recommended in general (Pallant, 2011:18). Tabachnick and Fidell (2007:613) reviewed this issue and suggested at least 300 cases for factor analysis. The sample size of this study (n = 310) therefore was considered suitable for factor analysis. For this study that adopted the mixed methodology, the sample population included a total of 310 participants separated into three groups. The quantitative phase involved group 1 and group 2 (n=300) while the qualitative phase involved group 3 (n=10). Data were collected between the periods May to December 2020.

6.5.1 Quantitative sampling frame and technique

According to Malhotra (2015:272), the sampling frame during the quantitative phase of any study represented the elements within a target population and consisted of a list for identifying the target population. The Ministry of Tourism and Leisure (MINTOUL, 2020) provided the sampling frame for the current study, which included a spreadsheet list of accredited travel agencies including category three (tour operators) agencies (MINTOUL, 2020). The researcher officially requested permission from the Ministry of Tourism and Leisure to conduct research among TOs in Cameroon. From the sample frame (section 6.4.3.1), 20 ITOs were selected using the purposive sampling method within the cities of Yaoundé and Douala which were all TOs located or at least had an office representation. As limitation encountered, it should be noted that during this COVID-19 period, there were lockdowns in Cameroon for more than six months which coincided with the period for field data collection and many travel agencies including TOs had their offices closed for most of the time and most owners and workers were unreachable by phone and / or email.

The participants involved during the quantitative phase of the online survey/questionnaire were the ITO staff (employees and managers / owners) and customers using the services of ITO from Cameroonian ITOs using the purposive sampling technique (see Table 11). Table

11 provided some justification to the sampling method adopted for this quantitative phase of the study based on some authors.

Table 11: Quantitative phase participant groups sample population

GROUP	DESCRIPTION	SAMPLE SIZE	SAMPLING METHOD JUSTIFICATION
Group 1	20 ITO companies (managers and employees) in Cameroon	150 individuals	Purposive sampling method was a technique not dependent of probability but depends on the researcher's sense of judgement when selecting the sample population (Etikan, et al., 2016:1; Saunders et al., 2016:301)
Group 2	Customers using ITO services	150 individuals	Homogenous sampling was a purposive sampling technique in which data was collected from a specific set of participants. For this study the participants involved were customers using ITO services. According to Lonner and Berry (1986). A homogeneous sample deleted the differences in demography among different participants. Therefore, they enhanced the cross-national comparability of the sample

Source: Author's elaboration

In this study, the focus was on the characteristics of service quality (attributes and dimensions) in ITOs in Cameroon with main aim to achieve a homogenous sample. Researchers like Lincoln and Guba (Wong & Chang, 2011:11) have stated that purposive sampling would be an appropriate technique in selecting participants in such a study with similar characteristics such as working in a particular job environment (for this study the same ITO) whose insights are relevant to the topic.

According to the Ministry of Tourism and Leisure (MINTOUL) official statistics, in Cameroon, there are well over 20 ITOs well established and operating for more than two years. Some researchers like Guest et al. (2006) and Creswell (2007) have recommended that any research that centres on understanding common features in a homogeneous collection, if the sample size to be considered were somewhat above 20 that size would be considered as appropriate and will be reasonable.

For this study, the group 1 target population included ITO's owners / managers and employees that would be selected using the purposive sampling method which will involve 150 individuals in total. Meanwhile group 2 target populations included customers using ITO services that would be selected using the homogenous sampling technique which was a type of purposive sampling method. In this study, the purposive technique was a non-probability method of sampling that was based on the researcher's decision about choosing which sample population to consider for the study. It was also referred to as judgmental, selective or subjective sampling method (Etikan et al., 2016:1).

The choice of this sample population for this quantitative phase was because of the related involvement of service provision between ITO staff (managers and employees) providing the service and ITO customers in need of such services. Hence, this quantitative phase involved two participant groups. Understanding the different stakeholder views provide more evidence and clarity as to how the process of service provision / delivery actually occurs. In this study, all the participating population were between the ages of 18-65 years. After the sampling size was known, the next step involved survey development of the quantitative research instrument including pilot testing.

6.5.2 Qualitative sampling frame and technique

In the qualitative phase, the expert sampling technique was to be applied to select and interview ten Cameroonian tourism professionals aged between 18-65 years who were either industry practitioners and / or academia having above five years working experience who are versed with the sample population being studied to share their expert views on the topic under investigation. According to some researchers, expert view was important in highlighting potential new areas of interest and opening doors for future research (Etikan et al., 2016: 2).

The qualitative phase mainly involved in-depth semi-structured interviews involving the third group of participants. Some ten tourism professionals/experts from Cameroon ITOs would be selected via expert sampling technique. Justification of the usage of this technique was highlighted in Table 12 below.

Table 12: Qualitative Phase participant group sample population

GROUP	DESCRIPTION	SAMPLE SIZE	SAMPLING METHOD JUSTIFICATION
Group 3	Ten tourism experts from Cameroon	Ten individuals	Expert sampling technique represented expert opinion and was applied when a study sought to opine individual's understanding in a specific expertise domain. Expert sampling technique was used to validate another sampling method (Singh, 2007). In this regards tourism professional practitioners and academia with more than five years of experience would be involved hoping that the point of saturation would be reached.

Source: Author's elaboration

6.6 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The research instruments are the specific techniques to be applied in a research in order to achieve its objectives. This study applied two instruments, namely; online survey (quantitative) and in-depth semi-structured interviews (qualitative) research techniques. The next section presents these instruments.

6.6.1 Quantitative research instrument: Online survey

Following the sequential mixed methods, research design adopted for this study which consisted of two phases; the quantitative and qualitative phases. During the quantitative phase, the survey questionnaire would be the selected data collection instrument whose findings would be used to guide in the development of the interview protocol during the qualitative phase involving in-depth interviews. The research instrument was developed based on the understanding of the quantitative objectives of this study which are to evaluate the effects of service quality expectation on service quality in the ITO industry; to examine the effects of service quality perception on service quality in the ITO industry; and to determine the influence of service experience on service quality in the ITO industry. This next section would be a discussion on the development of the data collection instrument applied in this quantitative phase, the survey questionnaire administered online.

6.6.1.1 Survey development

The next step in the research process after defining the target population and sample sizes was to identify, select and develop an appropriate research instrument. Based on the aim and objectives of this study, a self-administered online questionnaire was developed for the two (2) participating groups (group 1= ITO managers and employees; group 2=ITO customers) of this empirical study. A questionnaire was developed for ITO staff that was for the manager and employee while the questionnaire for customers focused on a particular set of same questions to obtain an overview of the different stakeholders taking part in the service provision and service delivery process.

The questionnaire was divided into two sections namely: section I – demographic information of participants and section II – measurement of core variables made of the independent latent constructs empathy, assurance, responsiveness, reliability and tangibility and the dependent latent construct service quality evaluation). For ease of access to the questionnaire online, three different links were created for managers, employees and customers included in one email to avoid any confusion when answering the questions. Each participant had to simply click on the corresponding link to answer the questions. It was also advantageous in that during data collection it was easy to identify and count the different respondents.

I. The part I of the questionnaire was designed such that the participant consent letter (Appendix C) served as an invitation asking for permission from the participant, capturing the interest of the participant and spurring the participant to take on the survey. The title and aim of the study were clearly stated. The participant was reminded how long it would take to complete the survey and that participation in the study remained anonymous, confidential, voluntary and if the participant wanted to withdraw from the survey he/she was free to do so. Participants were thanked for their participation. Section I ended with an introduction of the researcher.

II. Section I was composed of demographic questions in the management and employee questionnaires such as gender and age group of participants. The goal of asking these questions was to obtain valuable demographic information of respondents. For the customer questionnaire, the questions on demography included gender, age group and length of time respondents used ITO services.

Section II provided questions related to the measurement of the five identified core variables namely: - dependent latent construct empathy, assurance, responsiveness, reliability and tangibility and the dependent latent construct service quality evaluation). The basis for these constructs and items stemmed from previous studies as discussed in chapter 2, sections 2.11 and 2.11.2 of the literature review. Eleven (11) indicators in total were used in the operationalisation and measurement of the four specific constructs as follows: empathy [hospitality; value for money], assurance [safety and security; tour quality], responsiveness [ability to resolve problems; use of technology; time management], reliability [price; communication and information] and tangibility [hygiene and sanitation; logistics and amenities]. The same set of service perception and service expectation questions were rephrased to participants to understand how they rated service experience based on a five-point likert scale from 1 to 5 (1 to mean least important and 5 to mean most important).

The questionnaire was adapted from the TO service quality evaluation model developed by Pilelienė and Simkus (2012:110). Based on the analysis, criticism and improvement of the three service quality evaluation models developed by Grönroos (1984) who worked on the Perceived Service Quality model; Parasuraman et al.'s (1985; 1988) who worked on the Service Gap model and Brogowicz et al.'s (1990) who worked on the Synthesized Service Quality model. Pilelienė and Simkus (2012:110) concluded that their model was suitable to be applied within the TO (tourism) industry. In the adapted questionnaire adopted for this study, 11 service quality attributes / elements were considered, namely: hospitality, value for money, safety and security, tour quality, ability to resolve problems, use of technology, time management, price, communication and information, hygiene and sanitation, logistics and amenities (Q4 of manager and employee questionnaire). These are all grouped under the five service quality dimensions which are tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy developed by Parasuraman et al. (1991:446-449).

The questionnaire comprised a total of eight questions. Questions 1, 2 (section I) were focused on demographical data characteristics respectively that included gender and age group for the questionnaires for managers and employees meanwhile for the customers questionnaire demographic information requested included gender, age group and how long respondents had used ITO services. On the customer questionnaire, Questions 3 - "What do you understand by service quality" sought to provide an initial answer to the dependent variable construct of service quality evaluation. On the customer questionnaire, Question 4 "How would you rate the following TO service quality variables?" sought to provide answers to the independent variable empathy, assurance, responsiveness, reliability and tangibility.

The questions were loaded on an online platform named survey monkey (www.surveymonkey.com). The choice of this method was for two main reasons. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007) and Sapsford and Jupp (2006), firstly and from existing literature, it fitted the current sequential explanatory research design and the researcher was able to collect a sizeable amount of data from the sample population in an economical way. Secondly, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, physical distancing was highly recommended by UNISA for the preservation of the human health of participants in this study. Prior to administering the online survey via survey monkey, the approval letter from UNISA, Department of Applied Management (DAM) Research Ethics Review Committee was obtained. Before the survey was administered on the field, it was pre-tested on two persons from each participating group making a total of six persons to see if the questionnaire was valid to be widely distributed.

6.6.1.2 Pilot study

Pre-testing was an essential part of the instrument development (Kumar, 2011:24). The initial questionnaire was shared with my supervisors and statistician with minor modifications recommended. The questionnaire links online were made available to six participants (two ITO managers, two employees and two customers) who was randomly selected. The importance of this exercise was to test the understanding of the respondents to the questions asked; to see if the questions were rightly formulated; to understand how easy it was to access the questionnaire online and to see if the questionnaire could be answered in the time stipulated which was approximately seven minutes.

Within the month of June 2020, the links to the questionnaire was shared to two ITO managers who was earlier contacted. The managers had accepted to also share the email links to two of their employees who were readily available to provide answers given that owing to COVID-19, almost all TO offices were closed. Emails of customers were refused access to the researcher rather the managers promised sending the links to the customers directly whose responses were received directly on the platform. It should be noted that the researcher for the sake of gender balance requested that for each participating group there must be a male and a female participant and this requested was respected.

The pilot test questionnaire comprised two sections. Section I was on the biographic information of participants. This included age [Q1], gender [Q2] and marital status [Q3], income level [Q4] and experience [Q5]. Owing to the sensitivity of Q3 and Q4 they were excluded from the final questionnaire. Therefore, the final questionnaire had in section I only Q1, Q2 and Q5 for the customer questionnaire while in the manager and employee questionnaires only Q1 and Q2 appeared in the final questionnaire. Section II was composed of questions concerning the core variables being measured that was the independent latent constructs of the study being empathy, assurance, responsiveness, reliability and tangibility while service quality evaluation was considered as the dependent variable. These set of variables were modelled as exogenous constructs. In light with the overall assessment of indicators, a total of 11 indicators were retained in the operationalisation and measurement of the four research latent constructs in final questionnaire of this study. These constructs were operationalised using the following different indicators: empathy [hospitality; value for money], assurance [safety and security; tour quality], responsiveness [ability to resolve problems; use of technology; time management], reliability [price; communication and information] and tangibility [hygiene and sanitation; logistics and amenities]. To develop the final questionnaire, data analysis from the pilot test and feedback obtained from the six participants helped to fine tune the final questionnaire. Some of the comments received included merging some questions in section III that were related to one question; some questions were open-ended. Therefore, it was recommended that the researcher converts those questions into close-ended questions as they were not necessary for a quantitative study. However, they appreciated the short response time averagely ten minutes to answer all the questions.

Once collected on the field, the data were statistically analysed using the SPSS software version 26 and the findings presented in chapter 7 (quantitative data analysis), so as to capture the views of manager, employee and customer vis-à-vis service quality perception versus expectations. The process of quantitative data analysis included descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse both the biographic information of the customer and manager respondents and for data management. Meanwhile, the inferential statistical analysis was used to test the research hypotheses using the Pearson moment correlation and the multivariate regression model for customer respondents while Kendall correlation and measure for Skewness and kurtosis were conducted for manager respondents. All these details would be elaborately expatiated upon in chapter 7 on quantitative data analysis results presentation. The next section describes the survey questionnaire.

6.6.2 Qualitative research instrument: In-depth interview

Based on the data collected and analysed during the quantitative phase, the findings were used to prepare an interview guide instrument for the qualitative data. In-depth semi-structured interviews with ten tourism experts were conducted through zoom, in person (though respecting physical distancing of at least one meter) or telephone conversation to gather relevant in-depth data pertaining to this study. During this phase, the in-depth semi-structured interviews were recorded using an audiotape on my telephone to collect the original information which was later on transcribed word verbatim as purported by Creswell (2005) and then analysed. The next section discusses on the development of the interview protocol and how the interviews were conducted for this qualitative phase.

6.6.2.1 Interview protocol development

After the collection, analysis and obtaining of results in the quantitative phase, its findings provided valuable information that was used in the qualitative phase of this study to develop the interview guide which will serve as the data collection instrument (Creswell et al., 2003). The qualitative data collection method would take the form of in-depth semi-structured interviews with tourism professionals/experts in the industry versed with their respective sampled populations having at least five years professional experience. These interviews were carried out either in person or via zoom sessions. The in-depth interviews were structured with a standardised interview guide written in the English language which is the language of instruction in this study for better comprehension and uniformity.

As outlined in the research design for this study, the findings from the online survey conducted during the quantitative phase indeed served as guidelines in the preparation of the interview protocol. The initial interview questions comprised 11 questions that were pre-tested on three tourism experts who scrutinised the questions for relevance and significance in relation to the study's aim and objectives. Three of the questions were not found to be appropriate hence deleted from the final interview questions. The interview guide was made of three sections: section I was about consenting to participating in the interview. It was stated that participation was voluntary with no remuneration and the information provided would be kept strictly confidential. The time allocated for the process was spelled out. Section II was about the biographic information of interviewees. The questions focused on age, gender and years of experience in the industry. Gender was measured using binary categorical data meanwhile, age and experience were measured using continuous data structured in ranges. Section III contained five core questions to explore stakeholders' perspectives of the definition of the term service quality; to identify the key determinants of service quality, service quality perception and service expectation dynamics; to determine the service quality evaluation framework; and lastly, to discuss the implications of service quality and quality management. After the collection of the data, its analysis would be conducted using descriptive statistics and grounded theory analysis. In the next section, the research data collection instrument was discussed.

6.7 DATA COLLECTION METHOD

With the understanding that this study adopted the sequential explanatory mixed methods orientation, this section presented the quantitative data collection technique followed by the qualitative data collection.

6.7.1 Online questionnaire

The quantitative data was collected using a self-developed and pretested internet survey instrument. Prior to administering the questionnaires, the questionnaire was pre-tested for worthiness with two people from each participating group. Email invitations (see Appendix C) to participate in the survey were sent out seven days in advance to prepare respondent's minds and reminder emails were sent at least once every week to all participants and survey forms were presented in the English language. Cameroon being the only bilingual African country recognising the English and French languages as equal official languages, it was assumed that ITO staff can understand both English and French languages given that their customers expressed themselves in either of the two languages. Considering the timeframe, limited resources and most importantly the health crisis (COVID-19) the internet-based survey was employed because according to Rob (2015:440), survey mail was a major way for companies to evaluate service quality. Each of the questionnaires (see Annexure E, F, and G) would be kept short so that it takes only ten minutes to answer. For the research student to reduce the possibility of a low response rate would personalise the emails, post on social media and web links (WhatsApp, Face book, LinkedIn) and mobile SMS (short message service) were sent out to the different groups of participants. It was believed that a personalised email would be quickly attended to than a generalised email. In addition, reminders were sent to those who have partially or not answered the questionnaires but received the invitation once every three days. Upon emailing, the research student would collect only the contact details including phone numbers of ITO owners for direct calls or generate appointments and follow-up respondents. All respondents were given a total period of 22 weeks from 15 May – 15 October 2020 to complete responses from the online questionnaire. This timeframe was chosen with the understanding that online surveys generally have a low response rate. Therefore, several reminder calls had to be made to participants who were reluctant to take the survey. To measure the intensity of their responses in the survey, a five-point Likert scale was used for some of the questions. This was discussed in the data collection instrument section of this chapter.

The online survey (questionnaires) would be developed through survey monkey and distributed to participating ITOs (managers, employees and customers) through emails, social media posts, web links [such as LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and Facebook] or SMS. The ITO managers were required to share the respective questionnaires links to their respective employees and customers who had used or currently using ITO services. It should be noted that for client protection and anonymity, this study did not require customers to reveal their identities or contact information. Also, the questionnaire would be distributed to CEOs /

founders, senior level managers, mid-level managers and front office employees working in the ITO company.

6.7.2 In-depth semi-structured interviews

The sequential mixed methods research design was adopted for this study which consisted of two phases – the quantitative and qualitative phases. In section 6.5, the survey questionnaire was discussed. Its findings were used to guide in the development of the interview protocol during the qualitative phase involving semi-structured in-depth interviews. The data collection instrument applied in the qualitative phase of this study included in-depth semi-structured interviews [see Appendix H]. Prior to conducting the interviews with the tourism professionals, the researcher called up 13 experts via telephone who were selected through the expert sampling technique to introduce the topic. They were later on sent emails with the consent letter for the interviews from the 25 to 27 January 2021. One (1) week later [2-9 February 2021], ten experts had responded positively to the invitation who were then programmed following a two-week schedule from 15 to 28 February 2021. The researcher presented the two weeks schedule based on different time slots to the interviewees who according to their availability would choose dates and times that were most appropriate to them. The interviewees were informed that the interviews would be conducted either online via zoom or in person though respecting the COVID-19 barrier measures put in place by the Cameroon government to safeguard human life and preventing people from contracting the virus.

Effectively, seven interviews were conducted from the 17 to the 22 of February 2021 out of ten experts initially earmarked for the interview in this qualitative phase following the attainment of theoretical saturations. Each interview lasted approximately 10-15 minutes maximum. For the online interview, the respondent answered from his home while for the in-person interviews it was conducted at their offices. For the interviews conducted via telephone, the venue was inconsequential as all that was required was a quiet environment and good telephone network. The questions were asked chronologically to all respondents for consistency purposes.

The tourism professional’s thoughts and opinions on service quality were captured likewise their attitudes towards service quality evaluation in the TO industry in particular in

Cameroon. The interview gave room for more insight to the understanding of service quality perception and expectation of respondents and the causes and difficulties why there was poor service quality (Musikavanhu, 2017:120). Since the questionnaire questions were close ended, this interview was structured with open-ended questions to allow respondents freely express their minds and provide details that were rather absent during the survey phase.

The interviews were recorded verbatim using a computer laptop for the online interview with one (1) respondent; voice recorder was used for six respondents via telephone and three respondents in person. At the end of the interview phase, the recordings were transcribed using an online application called Transcribe Speech to Text which converted the audio recordings to text which were analysed from 8-11 March 2021.

6.8 DATA ANALYSIS

At the end after collecting the data in the quantitative phase, the data were analysed via the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software and a service quality score was calculated for each of the identified dimensions to prove the proposed model. Furthermore, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted during the quantitative phase. Data management; test of parametric assumptions; analysis of variance (ANOVA); test of validity and reliability measurement using Cronbach alpha were conducted. Inferential statistical analysis for customer respondents was used to test the research hypotheses using the Pearson moment correlation and the multivariate regression model. Meanwhile, inferential statistical analysis for manager respondents was based on the Kendall correlation and measure for skewness and kurtosis. Qualitative analysis comprised descriptive statistics of the interview response rate for seven respondents. Inferential analysis applied included grounded theory analysis to generate themes emerging from the qualitative dataset. The results obtained from the quantitative analysed data were used to develop the interview protocol and / or fine-tune the interview questions in the qualitative phase.

6.8.1 Coding data and analysis

To prove the proposed model with the support of a professional statistician from the UNISA, both data sets collected were analysed with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 26. The SPSS software was a cross-platform application for analysing mixed methods research in the social sciences and can carry out statistical analysis or offer integration with statistical packages (Fofang, 2014:15). Frequency analysis was conducted to display the various dimensions of service quality given by respondents. Given that the objective of this research was to develop a quality service evaluation framework for ITO industry, reliability of the data collected was checked by calculating Cronbach's alpha to measure customer perception and performance in the TO industry. According to Said et al. (2013:69), the higher the value towards 1.0 of the Cronbach's alpha will imply data are very reliable. Simple frequencies would be performed on respondent's demographic profiles and mean rating used to rate respondent's expectations and perceptions in relation to the different dimensions of service quality identified. To investigate the difference between expectations and perceptions of customers of ITO services on the service quality dimension(s) identified, the paired-sampled t-tests were applied. Therefore, the quality service level would be known by comparing what are the differences between scores of respondents' perceptions and expectations.

The process of data analysis would first start with a detailed reading of the transcripts, after which the research student would label the relevant pieces that seem recurrent or important. Then the research student would categorise the different codes in order of significance and decide which was most relevant and how they are connected. Once the findings from the quantitative and qualitative data sets have undergone coding and analysis, SPSS software was used to integrate both data sets. Also, the SPSS application enabled data exploration providing the research student with a comprehensive view and the final results presented and discussed.

6.8.2 Data cleaning and management processes

In line with the aforementioned review, it was necessary to highlight that data collected from online survey questionnaire was subjected to a series of data errors which if not properly identified and treated would compromise the outcome of the analysis. It was for such reasons that all variables observed in scholarly research were subjected to the test of validity and reliability in conformity with the requirements of parametric analysis. The phenomenon of incomplete records often started from wrong data entry to deliberate omission. To this effect, it was incumbent to identify missing data and provide suitable statistical treatment to mitigate their negative influences on the outcome of the analysis.

6.8.3 Data cleaning protocol

Sourcing data in its natural states was not void of statistical “impurities”. Data “impurities” had a strong influence on the accuracy of the measurement of statistical relationships and outputs. This accounted for the necessity to clean data and to downsize constructs that are irrelevant to the study. Moreover, data were cleaned to ensure that all variables in the proposed hypothetical model maintain adequate consistency among each other and eliminate missing responses. Descriptive analysis was conducted to check for minimum, maximum and mean data entered per item in order to detect wrong entries. Data entry errors or mistakes resulting from coding were eliminated and recorded. Item entries that had wrong responses entered were cross-tabulated and corrected by re-entering the correct responses from the corresponding questionnaires which were numbered during data entry.

6.8.4 Data analysis: Descriptive statistics and inferential analysis

This section on research data analysis would be presented in two paragraphs. Paragraph one would be the quantitative analysis while the next paragraph would be information for the qualitative data analysis. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses applied the same technique; that was, descriptive, statistical and inferential analysis.

The quantitative data analysis of this study made use of the descriptive statistical analysis and inferential analysis technique. Descriptive statistics included analysing the biographic information of both customers and managers respondents examined based on the parameters of gender, age and years of experience in the TO industry. The data management process started with the treatment of missing data, followed by dimension reduction analysis and lastly, the test of parametric assumptions especially the treatment of outliers, multivariate normality, multicollinearity and homogeneity of variance were presented for the customer respondents. The test of validity and reliability measurement was carried out using Cronbach alpha. The inferential statistical analysis for customer respondents (section A of chapter 7) was used to test the research hypotheses using the Pearson moment correlation. Multiple regression analyses were run to determine the causal relationships between the variables of the study in line with the hypotheses of the study in the customer respondents. Section B of this chapter 7 dwelled on presenting the statistical analysis of the manager respondents. The descriptive statistics focused on analysing the biographic information of manager respondents (gender, age and years of experience in the TO industry). Conversely, inferential statistical analysis of manager respondents was based on the non-parametric assumption technique called the Kendall correlation. The Kendall correlation was presented to analyse and test the hypothesis as it considered the particular order of the elements of the sets it was correlating.

Equally, the multivariate normality test that measured skewness and kurtosis was conducted for manager respondents. The test of skewness (symmetrical) and kurtosis (peakedness) was a strategy to identify normality in a distribution for each variable measured. As premised by Black et al. (1990), a suitable coeficient for kurtosis statistics should be between -5 - +5 while the measurement of the test statistics for skewness is premised to be between -3 - +3. In this study, the results of the measures of skewness and kurtosis were presented in chapter 7 section 7.6.1. Other multivariate normality tests conducted in this study included the test for normality using histogram and P-P plots; Multicolinearity test; homogeneity of variance test; Levene test; Pearson Moment Correlation and Multiple regression to test the hypotheses. All their results were presented in Chapter 7.

For this study's qualitative data analysis, descriptive statistics and grounded theory was conducted to analyse the socio-demographic questions including age [Q1], gender [Q2] and industrial experience [Q3] and the five core questions including: stakeholders' perspective of the definition of service quality [Q4]; identifying service quality determinants [Q5]; service quality perception and expectation dynamics [Q6]; service quality evaluation framework [Q7] and service quality management [Q8]. Three demographic considerations were identified. Gender was measured using binary categorical data meanwhile age and experience were measured using continuous data structured in ranges. The grounded theory relied on three pillars which were open coding process, axial coding process and selective coding process and considering this study the grounded theory sought to answer the following secondary objectives

I. To underscore the ITO industry experts' opinions of a working definition of service quality.

II. To explore the major determinants of service quality as perceived by experts in the ITO industry.

III. To identify the dynamics between service quality expectation and service quality perception as viewed by experts.

The qualitative data analysis process commenced with descriptive statistics of the socio-demographic information (age, gender and experience) provided by the interviewees. The core questions were analysed using the grounded theory analysis developing codes and themes that emerged from the data collected. During the grounded analysis, for each of the core questions in the interviews, the open coding, axial coding and selective coding processes was applied. Open coding was a process that identified common ideas at the point of theoretical saturation. Axial coding involved establishing a relationship between the codes identified during the open coding process. Finally, selective coding was the final stage and involved identifying a common theme that emerged from the data.

The main objective of the grounded theory analysis was to generate themes emerging from qualitative data collected, which was approved upon the attainment of theoretical saturations via a series of continuous compounding analysis of opinions which were grounded in the data. Upon the recommendation of Altinay et al. (2016:211) and Saunders et al. (2016:579), the researcher applied this approach as such

I. The data collected were read and transcribed using an online application called Transcribe Speech to Text which converted the audio recordings to text to identify recurring themes / patterns found within the data.

II. Using phrases and even words from the data, the researcher identified themes with similar meaning which were coded and categorised into a single grouping to help ease and trim down the data.

III. The codes and themes identified were then analysed through reflections, summaries and even memos (Saunders et al., 2016:579).

Grounded theory had the advantage in that it allowed for a straightforward and simplified analysis once the point of saturation was reached, meaning no new theme was identified from the data. This was indeed helpful in this phase of the study. The themes, categories and codes identified were then used to analyse and interpret the findings. These findings were presented in chapter eight on results of qualitative data analysis.

6.8.5 Process of triangulation and data integration

As identified in other mixed methods studies, authors like Ivankova, Creswell and Stick (2006:9) have evoked the problem of priority during the implementation and integration of both the quantitative and qualitative data approaches. Therefore, there must be consideration as to which approach should have more emphasis laid upon to establish the sequence for the collected and analysed data for both quantitative and qualitative methodology. Finally, it was decided on where or at what stage the integration of both data sets would actually occur within the study.

Priority is defined as the approach a researcher would place more emphasis or weight on all the process of collection and analysis of data (Morgan, 1998; Creswell, 2003). According to Creswell (2003), it is purported that it is a difficult issue to handle when it comes to prioritising. In this study, the priority would be equal for both the qualitative and qualitative phases as the research student believes that though the quantitative comes first in the sequence before the qualitative, both data sets provide vital information that is complementary to each other, therefore, strengthening the weaknesses and optimising the final results.

For triangulation, the quantitative and qualitative data sets were collected sequentially (implementation) and integrated during the final phase of the analysis. According to Hanson et al. (2005), in the sequential designs mixed methodology, there was a connection at the intermediate stage between the quantitative and qualitative phases (as illustrated in Figure 24). Triangulation was important in this study because using both the quantitative and qualitative data results brought about clarity in assessing the overlapping different and divergent views on the topic of service quality assessment in the TO industry for instance through observations, surveys) and also it would improve the control of inherent inferential threats (Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2011:4; Greene et al., 2007: xiii).

6.9 TEST OF VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY MEASUREMENT (VRM)

It was appropriate to ensure that the degree of validity and credibility of research instruments were suitable to test hypotheses. In line with scientific research, validity measured the degree to which constructs measure what they were supposed to measure (Weber, 2004; Sarantokos, 1997; Whichard, 2006) in a credible manner (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:28; Saunders et al., 2009:157) or the scope to which the measure represented correctly the theory under investigation (Quinlan, Babin, Carr, Griffin & Zikmund, 2015:24). According to Amaratunga et al. (2002:12), validity was defined as “the ability to describe reality with a good fit”. To this effect, construct validity was conducted to assess the degree to which the research constructs actually measured the theoretical constructs and explained results that were consistent with the literature (Sarantakos, 2005). There are two types of validity: internal and external validity. Internal validity “refer to whether or not what was identified as causes actually produced what was interpreted as the effect or the responses and checks whether the right cause and effect relationships were established”. Conversely, external validity refer to “the extent to which any research findings were generalised beyond the immediate research sample in which it took place thus findings in one sample were used in another group’s settings” (Amaratunga et al., 2002:29).

Similarly, the reliability test was considered. The theoretical premise of reliability was anchored on the ability of consistency, stability and repeatability of data collection instrument to produce reliable and consistent results (Hair et al., 2010; Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:93; Quinlan et al., 2015:24). This test was completed using the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient. The Cronbach’s alpha measured the level of consistency of the scale of measurement of research constructs (Field, 2009). Constructs with coefficients below the threshold of 0.70 as guided by (Nunnally, 1978) were dropped. However, it was noted that the test of validity and reliability were based on only retained constructs observed in the study. The results of Cronbach alpha were presented in chapter 7 (section 7.4.1). In the next section, credibility, trustworthiness and authenticity of the data are described.

6.10 CREDIBILITY, TRUSTWORTHINESS AND AUTHENTICITY

As there is validity of the data collection instrument in a quantitative studies, the equivalence in a qualitative study is called trustworthiness (Morrow, 2005:250). Guba (cited in Musikavanhu, 2017:126) asserted that in qualitative studies, trustworthiness was ensured by considering four quality criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These four quality criteria as described by Shelton (2004:73) are presented in Table 13.

Table 13: Qualitative research provisions that address Guba’s four quality criteria

Criterion	**Provison made by researcher**
Credibility	Use of appropriate research methods, understanding ITO

	culture, random sampling, ensuring honesty, peer scrutiny of project, use of reflective commentary, examination of previous research to frame the findings.
Transferability	Providing background data to establish study context, having detailed descriptions of phenomenon.
Dependability	Application of overlapping methods, in depth methodological description which allows for repetition of the study.
Confirmability	Use of triangulation, admission of researcher's beliefs and assumptions, recognition of limitations

Source: Adopted from Shenton (2004:73); Musikavanhu (2017:127)

In the qualitative phase of this study, Shelton's (2004:73) proposition was applied. Prior to conducting the interviews, the questions were pretested on three respondents to ensure clarity and proper understanding as they provided clear straight forward responses. Using the expert sampling technique to select the ten tourism experts having at least five years working experience and who are versed with the Cameroon TO industry. Data were collected through semi in-depth interview open questions lasting approximately 15 minutes asked to all respondents. The researcher applied face validity to ensure trustworthiness of the study. The interviews were all recorded word verbatim with the consent of respondents and transcribed for proper analysis.

Considering credibility, the researcher called up on several occasions all the experts involved in the interview phase of this study and further sent out emails with ample information concerning the interview process and even the study. During these exchanges, the researcher got to understand better who he was dealing with one-on-one, and this made the interview process much easy. With their approval, the researcher had the green light to proceed with the interview process.

For transferability, enough background study was conducted to provide context for this study and the results were applied to inform the study. The researcher as per the research design triangulated the interview findings together with the quantitative data findings to give meaningful interpretation which would be presented in the chapter on conclusion on recommendation. However, some limitations were noticed and acknowledged during the interview phase such as interrupted internet connectivity issues and distractions from around making respondents not fully concentrated. The next section discussed the qualitative data analysis.

6.11 ETHICS IN RESEARCH

According to De Vos et al. (2012:115), researchers must practice and internalise ethical principles to be able to make sound guided decisions for respondents to be treated fairly, sensitively and humanely. Concerns in conducting sound research must be addressed such as participation in the study is informative and voluntary, confidential, anonymous and of low risk level (De Vos et al., 2012:58).

Ethical clearance, which was very important for this research, was requested from the UNISA Department of Applied Management Research Ethics Review Committee (DAM-RERC) complying strictly with the UNISA policy on ethical research. The ethical clearance for this research was therefore approved [ERC Reference #: 2019_CEMS_DAM_020.] after a thorough and careful review (see Appendix A). Equally, before the researcher descended to the field of study, the competent authority in this case MINTOURL, Cameroon was informed and permission requested from the competent authority to avoid any mishaps on the field. Official permission was sought from MINTOURL to conduct this study among TOs in Cameroon who must be affiliated / accredited and had a licence obtained from the ministry to operate. This special permission was granted (see Appendix B).

The consent of the owners of TO companies that participated in this study was approved after email exchanges and/or phone discussion. The owners/founders of ITOs informed via email their staff (managers and employees) and customers of the study. Questionnaires were administered via online instrument [survey monkey]. In total 126 were collected and analysed. Possible reasons for the low response rate were reported under research limitations (section 9.6) in the conclusion’s chapter owing to COVID-19 and the barrier measures put in place, the researcher minimised physical contacts to the barest minimum. The researcher ensured complete adherence to sound ethical practices at all stages while conducting the research on the field.

6.12 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter six focused and provided justifications concerning the design and methodology applied in this study. This began with a methodological presentation of the techniques applied to source for information. The information was obtained from exploratory data (secondary source) that is extant literature from related articles and books on the topic under investigation. Empirical descriptive research (primary source) was obtained on the field. For this study, the research design adopted was the sequential explanatory mixed method which was illustrated by the research onion developed by Saunders et al. (2016). The research philosophical position elaborated was that of positivism and interpretivism. The deductive research approach was applied for this study as it developed the hypotheses for this study based on other pre-existing theories discussed in detail in chapter four (section 4.1) on theoretical background which was then later on tested in the research.

In the application of the sequential exploratory mixed methods approach, the quantitative phase of this study included data sampling through the purposive sampling technique (section 6.4.2). Questionnaire self-administration using an online survey called survey monkey was used to administer questionnaires to TO managers and employees and customers who use and / or are using the services of these providers to evaluate, examine and determine the effects of service quality expectations, perceptions and experiences on service quality (section 1.4.2.1). The online questionnaire consisted of three main parts. The first part dwelled on questions of participant's demography (gender and age). The second part contained questions on respondents' expectations of service quality in/with an ITO company and the third part contained questions pertaining to respondent's perception of service quality experience in/with ITO company. Each questionnaire ranged from seven to eight questions and answers to the questions were narrowed to not more than ten minutes. The total timeframe during which data were collected over a period of six months (from May 15 to October 2020) given the slow response rate observed during data collection. The data were analysed by using the SPSS 26 software with the assistance of a professional statistician to interpret the results on descriptive statistics – Analysis of both the customer and manager questionnaires were conducted and their results are presented respectively in chapter 7 sub-section A and B. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse both the biographic information of the customer and manager respondents and for data management. In contrast, inferential statistical analysis was used to test the research hypotheses using the Pearson moment correlation and the multivariate regression model for customer respondents while Kendall correlation and measure for skewness and kurtosis were conducted for manager respondents (section 7.4; 7.5; 7.6; 7.7; 7.8).

The findings from the quantitative phase were used to develop the interview tool to be used in the qualitative phase. In-depth semi-structured interviews with seven tourism experts were conducted through zoom, in person (though respecting physical distancing of at least one meter) or telephone conversation to gather relevant in-depth information pertaining to this study and to help provide more answers and clarity where there were any ambiguities in the quantitative phase. During this phase, the in-depth semi structured interviews were recorded using an audiotape on my telephone to collect the original information which was later on analysed.

Data analysis first started with a detailed reading of the transcripts, after which the researcher labelled the relevant pieces that seemed recurrent or important. Then the researcher categorised the different codes in order of significance and decided which was most relevant and how they were connected. This process was called data coding.

The qualitative analysis focused on descriptive statistics considering age, gender and experience in the TO industry. The core questions of the interview focused around understanding the stakeholders' perspective of the definition of the term service quality; identifying service quality determinants; service quality perception and service expectation dynamics; service quality evaluation framework and service quality and quality management. These were analysed using the provisions of the grounded theory approach with the intention to model a framework for effective service quality model for the TO industry (Section 7.3). Once the findings from the quantitative and qualitative data sets had undergone coding, analysis or evaluation, SPSS software then helped to integrate both data sets to present a comprehensive meaningful report that was discussed in the final chapter (chapter 9) on conclusions and recommendations of this study. The next chapter (chapter 7) presented the detailed quantitative and qualitative data analyses findings.

CHAPTER SEVEN

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH RESULTS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of the study was to model an effective and efficient service quality evaluation framework for the ITO industry within the context of the Cameroon TO industry and following the mixed methods approach. The quantitative analysis of this study was completed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Analysis of both the customer and manager questionnaires were conducted and their results are presented respectively in sub-section A and B. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse both the biographic information of the customer, manager respondents and for data management. Conversely, the inferential statistical analysis was used to test the research hypotheses using the Pearson moment correlation and the multivariate regression model for customer respondents while Kendall correlation and measure for skewness and kurtosis were conducted for manager respondents.

The five hypothetical relationships as modelled in the conceptual framework

H_1: Empathy had a positive and significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation;
H_2: Assurance had a positive and significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation;
H_3: Responsiveness had a positive and significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation;
H_4: Reliability had a positive and significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation; and
H_5: Tangibility had a positive and significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.

These hypotheses were tested using the provisions of the Pearson moment correlation to confirm or reject the following hypothetical relationships. The observed independent latent constructs of this study were: [empathy, assurance, responsiveness, reliability and tangibility] while service quality evaluation was observed as the independent variable.

In light with the overall assessment of indicators, it was observed that 11 factors were used in the operationalisation and measurement of the five independent latent constructs. These variables included empathy [2], assurance [2], responsiveness [2], reliability [3] and tangibility [2].

In completing this chapter on quantitative data analysis, other statistical procedures such as parametric assumptions including outliers, multivariate normality, multicollinearity and homogeneity of variance were conducted. The observed independent latent constructs of the study were reliability, responsiveness, empathy, tangibility and assurance while service quality evaluation was considered as the dependent variable.

The next section of this chapter was presented in two (2) parts. Part A would consist of the data analysis conducted, results presentation and ensuing discussions from the customer respondents followed by Part B on the data analysis, results presentation and discussions from the manager respondents. Owing to the very small response rate of the employees (n=4) during the data collection phase, data analysis was not carried out for this group of respondents.

A. ANALYSIS PRESENTATION OF CUSTOMER RESPONDENTS

7.2 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR CUSTOMER RESPONDENTS

This sub-section of this chapter related to the analysis of the customer questionnaire response rate [see Annexure E] and the demographic information of the customer respondents [n=126] of the study and addressed the following secondary objectives:

I. To evaluate the effects of customer service quality expectation on service quality in the ITO industry.
II. To examine the effects of customer service quality perception on service quality in the ITO industry.
III. To determine the influence of customer service experience on service quality in the ITO industry.
IV. To identify the service quality determinant factors unique to the TO industry.

7.2.1 Demographic Information of Customer respondents

The distribution of participants' information and demographic characteristics was used to ensure that the sample frame was appropriate for the study. The measurement criteria for demographic information were based on categorical nominal and binary data. These parameters included gender of participants = [Female] and [Male], Age group of participants = [18 – 20], [21 – 30], [31 – 40], [41 – 50], and [51 – 65] and the level of experience in using ITO services [< 2 Year], and [Above 2 Years]. These were based on the questions [1; 2 and 3] in the customer questionnaire [Annexure E]. Table 14 depicts a summary of the demographic information composed of age, gender and level of experience.

7.2.1.1 Gender of customer respondents

As observed in the study, gender was both female and male considerations. The measurement was binary categorical data. The gender representation consisted of 85 males and 41 females representing a sample of 126 respondents. There were no cases of missing data. Based on the gender distribution, there were more males than females. The issue of gender discrimination was not observed as the sample frame constituted an appropriate representation of the target population. The study consisted of three strata of participants including managers, employees and customers of both sex but this result presented was representative only for customers. The inclusion of gender considerations goes a long way to enhance the validity and reliability of the study. In this light, it was evident to suggest that the sample was appropriate for the analysis and as such; the analysis was not gender bias as shown in Table 14.

7.2.1.2 Age of customer respondents

The distribution of participants by age was a vital demographic characteristic to ensure valid and appropriate responses. In this study, age was measured using non-categorical data ranging from [18 – 20], [20 – 30], [31 – 40], [41 – 50] and [50 – 65]. The population of service customers in the TO industry ranges from teenagers to adults. In effect, purchase decisions of TO services are often concluded by adults who can afford such services. To this effect, opinions of all strata of participants based on age were considered in the data collection and analysis processes. This mitigates any possibility of bias response. Majority of the participants were between the ages of [31-40 years]. The tests of hypotheses were a blend of opinions of different participants based on the following age specifications shown in Table 14.

7.2.1.3 Industry or service experience of customer respondents

Industry or service experience relates to the number of years of active use or being in the industry. It was important for participants to possess appropriate level of industrial knowledge and experience to be considered suitable for the study. In this study, the measurement of service experience was based on two categories: [less than 2 years], and [more than 2 years]. Majority of the customer respondents had service experience more than 2 years. Based on this outcome, the years of service experience of this study was appropriate as the sample frame was a representation of the population consisting of participants with service experiences from [< 2 years to > 2 years]. The opinions of all strata of participants based on years of experience for the aforementioned categories were considered in the data collection and analysis process as shown in Table 14.

Table 14: Descriptive statistics of customer respondents

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td>Number of observations</td><td>%</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">1. Gender [7.2.1.1]</td><td>Male</td><td>85</td><td>67.5%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Female</td><td>41</td><td>32.5%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Total</td><td>126</td><td>100.0%</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td>Number of observations</td><td>%</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="6">2. Age [7.2.1.2]</td><td>18- 20</td><td>4</td><td>3.2%</td></tr>
<tr><td>20-30</td><td>16</td><td>12.7%</td></tr>
<tr><td>31-40</td><td>70</td><td>55.6%</td></tr>
<tr><td>41-50</td><td>23</td><td>18.3%</td></tr>
<tr><td>50-65</td><td>13</td><td>10.3%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Total</td><td>126</td><td>100.0%</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td>Number of observations</td><td>%</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">3. How long have you been using ITO services [7.2.1.3]</td><td>Less than 2 years</td><td>42</td><td>33.3%</td></tr>
<tr><td>More than 2 years</td><td>84</td><td>66.7%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Total</td><td>126</td><td>100.0%</td></tr>
</table>

Source: Field Data

7.3 DESCRIPTIVE PRESENTATION OF THE CONSTRUCTS OF THE STUDY

The observed independent latent constructs of the study were empathy, assurance, responsiveness, reliability and tangibility while Service Quality Evaluation was considered as the dependent variable. These constructs were operationalised using the following different indicators: empathy [hospitality; value for money], assurance [safety and security; tour quality], responsiveness [ability to resolve problems; use of technology; time management], reliability [price; communication and information] and tangibility [hygiene and sanitation; logistics and amenities] to measure the level of service perception and service expectation as revealed by customer participants in the study using different scales structures as shown in Table 15 which depicts a summary of all the indicators considered under the constructs of this study.

7.3.1 Participants response rate of hospitality

Hospitality generally refers to the warm welcome given to customers. They would expect to be treated courteously and in a friendly manner from the very first contact point; for instance, at main port of entry or airport (Burns et al., 2003). Authors such as Poon and Low (2005), Kozak (2001) and Yuksel and Yuksel (2001) considered hospitality as an important topic of tourism service quality dimension. In this study, TO service quality was operationalised using the hospitality item [question 4.1 of the customer questionnaire] which was measured using the five-point Likert scale ranging from 1[least important] to 5 [most important]. Apparently, one scale was considered missing owing to wrong data entry. Customer respondents were required to indicate the perceived level of hospitality as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 2.4% of the respondents showed that hospitality was least important compared to 40.5 % who considered hospitality as somewhat very important. A combined number of 98.6% were affirmative that hospitality was important for the TO industry in Cameroon as shown in Table 15.

7.3.2 Perceived level of value for money

According to O'Neill and McKenna (1994), tourism businesses like TOs are there to serve customers and to make them come back; hence customers expect real value for their money always. Value was considered as the price paid for a given type of quality (Fornell et al., 1996). Value for money gave a balance in terms of price and quality (Yuksel and Yuksel, 2001). In literature, previous studies state that considering the ACSI model, perceived value for money was regarded a precursor of customer satisfaction (Fornell et al., 1996). According to Narayan et al. (2009:81), price and its value (Yuksel & Yuksel, 2001), pricing and payment (Poon & Low, 2005) and price levels (kozak 2001) were considered by researchers as an important factor of quality service dimension in their tourism study. However, few authors accept regarding the value for money as a dimension of quality service in tourism literature (Narayan et al., 2009: 80). In this study, service quality was equally operationalised using the perceived value for money [question 4.2 of the customer questionnaire] item which was measured using the 5 scales ranging from least important to most important. Apparently, three scales were considered missing owing to wrong data entry. The valid responses were for least important and most important. Customer respondents were required to indicate their perceived level of value for money as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 2.4% of the respondents revealed that value for money was least important while 23.8% revealed that value for money was most important in the TO industry as shown in Table 15.

7.3.3 The perceived level of safety and security

Every tourist considers their security when they choose to visit a destination. Areas of conflict were generally turned down by tourists as they wanted to visit safe places (Robinson 2003). Increasingly, studies have considered security as an unavoidable service quality dimension when it comes to tourism (Poon & Low, 2005; Weiermair & Fuchs, 1999). In addition, as observed in this study, service quality was also operationalised using the perceived level of safety and security [question 4.3 of the customer questionnaire] which was measured using the five-point scales ranging from 1 [least important] to 5 [most important]. Apparently, three scales were considered missing owing to wrong data entry. The valid responses were for least important and most important. Customer respondents were required to indicate their perceived level of safety and security as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 3.2% of the respondents observed that safety and security were least important while 38.9% revealed that safety and security were very important in the TO industry as shown in Table 15.

7.3.4 The perceived level of tour quality

The quality of the tour package composed of hotel, food and beverage, transport, leisure activities etc. proposed to customers was very important. The way such services all combined in a package are delivered to customers gave that sense of service quality and enables them to rate whether they are getting a high or low value for their money. It should be remembered that the characteristic features of a tour quality service was as important as the way it was delivered (Rust and Oliver, 1994). Tour quality [question 4.4 of the customer questionnaire] was also considered as a relevant measurement of service quality. It was measured using the five-point likert scales ranging from 1 [least important] to 5 [most important]. Apparently, three scales were considered missing owing to wrong data entry. The valid responses were for least important and most important. Respondents were required to indicate their perceived level of tour quality as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 3.2% of the respondents responded that tour quality was least important while 27.8% revealed that tour quality was most important in the TO industry in Cameroon as shown in Table 15.

7.3.5 Ability to resolve problems

In this study, service quality was operationalised using the ability to resolve problems [question 4.5 of the customer questionnaire] which was measured using the five-point likert scale ranging from 1[least important] to 5[most important]. Apparently, three scales were considered missing owing to wrong data entry. The valid responses were for least important and most important. Customer respondents were required to indicate their level for ability to resolve problems as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 3.2% of the respondents revealed that the ability to resolve problems was least important while 31.0% revealed that ability to resolve problems was most important in the TO industry as shown in Table 15.

7.3.6 The use of technology

The use of technology [question 4.6 of the customer questionnaire] was also used to measure service quality. It was operationalised using five-point likert scale ranging from 1[least important] to 5[most important]. Apparently, three scales were considered missing owing to wrong data entry. The valid responses were for least important and most important.

Respondents were required to indicate their level of use of technology as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 4.0% of the respondents showed that the use of technology was least important while 27.8% revealed that use of technology was most important in the TO industry as shown in Table 15.

7.3.7 Perceived level of time management

In this study, time management [question 4.7 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point likert scale ranging from 1[least important] to 5[most important]. Apparently, three scales were considered missing owing to wrong data entry. The valid responses were for least important and most important. Customer respondents were required to indicate their level for time management as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 1.6% of the respondents revealed that time management was least important while 69.8% revealed that time management was most important in the TO industry as shown in Table 15.

7.3.8 Perceived level of price

Price has a vital place in the mind of the customer because that was what the customer used to judge if the quality was up to the price paid. According to Narayan (2009), previous studies in western countries showed that there was impact of difference in pricing on tourist satisfaction. However, studies in south Asian countries had shown interest in measuring how pricing affected tourist's satisfaction levels. In this study, price [question 4.8 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point likert scale ranging from 1[least important], to 5[most important. Apparently, three scales were considered missing owing to wrong data entry. The valid responses were for least important and most important. Customer respondents were required to indicate their level for price as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 1.6% of the respondents revealed that price was least important while 22.2% revealed that price was most important in the TO industry as shown in Table 15.

7.3.9 Perceived influence of communication and information

It is no doubt that ICT has revolutionised communication, and it is a do or die fact for service providers in the tourism industry. The right and availability of information to a customer (tourist) was vital and necessary for the giving a competitive edge. From the search stage to undertaking the travel and even while at the destination the power of information cannot be underestimated. In this study, communication and information [question 4.9 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point Likert scale ranging from 1[Least important] to 5[most important]. Apparently, three scales were considered missing owing to wrong data entry. The valid responses were for least important and most important. Customer respondents were required to indicate their level of perceived communication and information as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 1.6% of the respondents revealed that ICT was least important while 28.6% revealed that communication and information was most important in the TO industry as shown in Table 15. Hence, the item on ICT should be considered very important for tourist satisfaction (Burns et al., 2003).

7.3.10 Perceived influence of hygiene and sanitation

Hygiene played a very important role at a destination. In developing countries (especially in sub-Saharan Africa), the hygienic conditions left much to be desired compared to destinations of other developed countries. It was observed that when tourists move from a destination in a developed country to another destination in a developing country especially in Cameroon, the wide gap observed in hygiene was a serious call for concern. This fact has raised so much alarm that it has received the attention of many researchers (Kozak, 2001; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2001) who conducted studies in areas such as hygiene and sanitation/ cleanliness at airports; leisure sites; restaurants; how clean the streets were and the hygienic level of food served at eateries (Tribe & Snaith, 1998; Yuksel and Yuksel, 2001). In this study, perceived influence of hygiene and sanitation [question 4.10 of the customer questionnaire] were measured using the five-point like scale ranging from 1[least important to 5[most important]. Apparently three scales were considered missing owing to wrong data entry. The valid responses were for least important and most important. Respondents were required to indicate their level for hygiene and sanitation as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 1.6% of the respondents revealed that hygiene and sanitation were least important while 26.2% revealed that hygiene and sanitation were most important in the TO industry as shown in Table 15.

7.3.11 Perceived influence of logistics and amenities

The type of vehicles and the comfort to offer customers as they choose a destination must be carefully thought of by the TO because the personnel like the drivers and/or tour guides forming part of the logistics was always courteous during the trip. Previous studies have indicated that tourists show much concern about the road infrastructural network and its accessibility at destinations (kozak, 2001; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2001). Though away from home, they would like to stay connected with family, friends and work. Amenities such as internet and other ICT services (Tribe & Snaith, 1998); exchange of foreign currency; medical services (Chaudhary, 2000) among others are important. In this study, the level of perceived influence of logistics and amenities [question 4.11 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point likert scale ranging from 1 [least important] to 5 [most important]. However, three scales were considered missing owing to wrong data entry. The valid responses were for least important and most important. Customer respondents were required to indicate their level for logistics and amenities as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 2.4% of the respondents revealed that logistics and amenities were least important while 22.2% revealed that logistics and amenities were most important in the TO industry as shown. Therefore, transportation logistics and amenities are a vital theme for any tourism establishment dealing with customers. Table 15 presented the results of all 11 service quality items discussed.

Table 15: Perception of Service Quality dimension items

Hospitality [7.3.1]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Least important	3	2.4	2.4	2.4
	3	36	28.6	28.6	31.0
	4	51	40.5	40.5	71.4
	Most important	36	28.6	28.6	100.0
	Total	126	100.0	100.0	
Value for Money [7.3.2]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Least important	3	2.4	2.4	2.4
	2	5	4.0	4.0	6.3
	3	44	34.9	34.9	41.3
	4	44	34.9	34.9	76.2

	Most important	30	23.8	23.8	100.0
	Total	126	100.0	100.0	
Safety and Security [7.3.3]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Least important	4	3.2	3.2	3.2
	2	4	3.2	3.2	6.3
	3	26	20.6	20.6	27.0
	4	43	34.1	34.1	61.1
	Most important	49	38.9	38.9	100.0
	Total	126	100.0	100.0	
Tour quality [7.3.4]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Least important	4	3.2	3.2	3.2
	2	3	2.4	2.4	5.6
	3	39	31.0	31.0	36.5
	4	45	35.7	35.7	72.2
	Most important	35	27.8	27.8	100.0
	Total	126	100.0	100.0	
Ability to resolve problems [7.3.5]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Least important	4	3.2	3.2	3.2
	2	8	6.3	6.3	9.5
	3	36	28.6	28.6	38.1
	4	39	31.0	31.0	69.0
	Most important	39	31.0	31.0	100.0
	Total	126	100.0	100.0	
The Use of technology [7.3.6]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Least important	5	4.0	4.0	4.0
	2	9	7.1	7.1	11.1
	3	29	23.0	23.0	34.1
	4	48	38.1	38.1	72.2
	Most important	35	27.8	27.8	100.0

	Total	126	100.0	100.0	
Time management [7.3.7]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Least important	2	1.6	1.6	1.6
	2	8	6.3	6.3	7.9
	3	38	30.2	30.2	38.1
	4	40	31.7	31.7	69.8
	Most important	38	30.2	30.2	100.0
	Total	126	100.0	100.0	
Price [7.3.8]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Least important	2	1.6	1.6	1.6
	2	11	8.7	8.7	10.3
	3	48	38.1	38.1	48.4
	4	37	29.4	29.4	77.8
	Most important	28	22.2	22.2	100.0
	Total	126	100.0	100.0	
Communication & Information [7.3.9]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Least important	2	1.6	1.6	1.6
	2	10	7.9	7.9	9.5
	3	28	22.2	22.2	31.7
	4	50	39.7	39.7	71.4
	Most important	36	28.6	28.6	100.0
	Total	126	100.0	100.0	
Hygiene and sanitation [7.3.10]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Least important	2	1.6	1.6	1.6
	2	8	6.3	6.3	7.9
	3	31	24.6	24.6	32.5
	4	52	41.3	41.3	73.8
	Most important	33	26.2	26.2	100.0
	Total	126	100.0	100.0	

Logistics and amenities 7.3.11]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Least important	3	2.4	2.4	2.4
	2	7	5.6	5.6	7.9
	3	44	34.9	34.9	42.9
	4	44	34.9	34.9	77.8
	Most important	28	22.2	22.2	100.0
	Total	126	100.0	100.0	

[Source: Field Data]

Case Processing Summary

Taking a global view of all 11 service quality dimension items considered in this study representing the five latent independent constructs. These items were summarised as follows:

Table 16: Case Summary of service quality dimension items

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Per cent	N	Per cent	N	Per cent
Hospitality	12	92,3%	1	7,7%	13	100,0%
Value for money	12	92,3%	1	7,7%	13	100,0%
Safety and security	11	84,6%	2	15,4%	13	100,0%
Tour quality	12	92,3%	1	7,7%	13	100,0%
Ability to resolve problems	12	92,3%	1	7,7%	13	100,0%
Use of technology	12	92,3%	1	7,7%	13	100,0%
Time management	12	92,3%	1	7,7%	13	100,0%

Price	11	84,6%	2	15,4%	13	100,0%
Communication and information	12	92,3%	1	7,7%	13	100,0%
Hygiene and sanitation	12	92,3%	1	7,7%	13	100,0%
Logistics and amenities	11	84,6%	2	15,4%	13	100,0%

Source: Field Data

Looking at the Table 16 above, it was concluded that the items hospitality, value for money, tour quality, ability to resolve problems, use of technology, time management, communication and information, and hygiene and sanitation each had 92.3% and are considered to be very important items when considering service quality in the TO industry in Cameroon. Meanwhile safety and security, price and logistics and amenities which each had 84.6% were considered important when considering the service quality in the TO industry in Cameroon.

When considering the mean from the statistics of the service quality items to determine which came first, from the Table 16 it was deduced that in order of importance the following items were ranked as follows: hygiene and sanitation [mean 4.33], tour quality [4.17], safety and security [4.09], ability to resolve problems [4.00], time management [4.00], logistics and amenities [4.00], communication and information [3.92], hospitality [3.92], use of technology [3.67], price [3.64] and value for money [3.42].

Table 17: Statistical Mean of items

Items	Statistics	
	Mean	Std. Error
Hospitality	3.92	0.313
Value for money	3.42	0.313
Safety and security	4.09	0.476
Tour quality	4.17	0.241
Ability to resolve problems	4.00	0.275
Use of technology	3.67	0.310
Time management	4.00	0.275
Price	3.64	0.453
Communication and information	3.92	0.398
Hygiene and sanitation	4.33	0.333
Logistics and amenities	4.00	0.234

Source: Field data

7.3.12 Expectation of the ITO to have modern service equipment

In this study, the level of expectation of the ITO to have modern service equipment [question 5.1 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using five-point likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their expectation level for modern service equipment as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 0.8 % of the respondents revealed that they disagree to expect the ITO to have modern service equipment while 53.3% strongly agree that they expect the ITO to have modern service equipment as this was very important in the TO industry as shown in Table 18.

7.3.13 Expectation of the ITO to have clean furniture

In this study, the expectation of the ITO to have clean furniture equipment [question 5.2 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their level of expectations regarding the view that ITO has clean furniture as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 0.8 % of the respondents revealed that they disagree to expect ITO to have clean furniture while 55.5% strongly agree that they expect ITO to have clean furniture as this very important in the TO industry as shown in Table 18.

7.3.14 Expectation of the ITO employees to have a neat appearance

In this study, the expectation of ITO employees to have a neat appearance equipment [question 5.3 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their level of expectations regarding the expectation of ITO employees to have a neat appearance as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 4.0% of the respondents revealed that they were neutral to the expectation of ITO employees to have a neat appearance while 64.3% strongly agree that they expected ITO employees to have a neat appearance as this very important in the TO industry as shown in Table 18.

7.3.15 Expectation of the ITO to have a sincere interest in solving customer's problems

In this study, the expectation of ITO to have a sincere interest in solving customer's problems equipment [question 5.4 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their level of expectations regarding the expectation of ITO to have a sincere interest in solving customer's problems as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 2.4% of the respondents revealed that they were neutral to the expectation of ITO to have a sincere interest in solving customers' problems while 72.2% strongly agree that they expect ITO employees to have a sincere interest in solving customers' problems as this very important in the TO industry as shown in Table 18.

7.3.16 Expectation of the ITO to deliver the services right the first time to customers

In this study, the expectation of ITO to deliver the services right the first time to customers [question 5.5 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their level of expectations regarding the expectation of ITO to deliver the services right the first time to customers as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 0.8% of the respondents revealed that they disagree with the expectation of ITO to deliver the services right the first time to customers while 40.5% strongly agree that they expect ITO to deliver the services right the first time to customers as this was very vital in the TO industry as shown in Table 18.

7.3.17 Expectation of the ITO to deliver the services to customers in time

In this study the expectation of ITO to deliver the services to customers in time [question 5.6 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their level of expectations regarding the expectation of ITO to deliver the services to customers in time as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 3.2% of the respondents revealed that they were neutral to the expectation of ITO to deliver the services to customers in time while 59.5% strongly agree that they expect ITO to deliver the services to customers in time as this was very vital in the TO industry as shown in Table 18.

7.3.18 Expectation of the ITO to provide customers with the correct bill

In this study the expectation of ITO to provide customers with the correct bill [question 5.7 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their level of expectations regarding the expectation of ITO to provide customers with the correct bill as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 4.0% of the respondents revealed that they were neutral to the expectation of ITO to provide customers with the correct bill while 65.1% strongly agreed that they expected ITO to provide customers with the correct bill as this was very essential in the TO industry as shown in Table 18.

7.3.19 Expectation of the ITO employees to offer reliable services

In this study the expectation of ITO employees to offer reliable services [question 5.8 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their level of expectations regarding the expectation of ITO employees to offer reliable services as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 0.8% of the respondents revealed that they strongly disagree with the expectation of ITO employees to offer reliable services while 54.0% strongly agree that they expect ITO employees to offer reliable services as this was very essential in the TO industry as shown in Table 18.

7.3.20 Expectation of the ITO employees to give quick service

In this study the expectation of ITO employees to provide quick service [question 5.9 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their level of expectations regarding the expectation of ITO employees to give quick service as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 0.8% of the respondents revealed that they strongly disagree with the expectation of ITO employees to provide quick service while 42.9% strongly agree that they expect ITO employees to provide quick service as this was very essential in the TO industry as shown in Table 18.

7.3.21 Expectation of the ITO employees to greet and welcome customers in a friendly manner

In this study the expectation of ITO employees to greet and welcome customers in a friendly manner [question 5.10 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their level of expectations regarding the expectation of ITO employees to greet and welcome customers in a friendly manner as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 0.8% of the respondents revealed that they strongly disagree with the expectation of ITO employees to greet and welcome customers in a friendly manner while 55.6% strongly agree that they expect ITO employees to greet and welcome customers in a friendly manner as this was very essential in the TO industry as shown in Table 18.

7.3.22 Expectation of the ITO employees’ behaviour to instil confidence in customers

In this study the expectation of ITO employees’ behaviour to instil confidence in customers about the employees [question 5.11 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their level of expectations regarding the expectation of ITO employees' behaviour to instil confidence in customers about the employees as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 0.8% of the respondents revealed that they strongly disagree with the expectation of ITO employees' behaviour to instil confidence in customers about the employees while 61.1% strongly agree that they expect ITO employees' behaviour to instil confidence in customers about the employees as this was very essential in the TO industry as shown in Table 18.

7.3.23 Expectation of the ITO to be trustworthy

In this study the expectation of ITO to be trustworthy [question 5.12 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their level of expectations regarding the expectation of ITO to be trustworthy as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 1.6% of the respondents revealed that they strongly disagree with the expectation of ITO to be trustworthy while 69.8% strongly agreed that they expected ITO to be trustworthy as this was very important in the TO industry as shown in Table 18.

7.3.24 Expectation of the ITO employees to give customers special attention

In this study the expectation of ITO employees to give customers special attention [question 5.13 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their level of expectations regarding the expectation of ITO employees will give customers special attention as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 0.8 % of the respondents revealed that they strongly disagree with the expectation of ITO employees will give customers special attention while 46.0% strongly agree that they expected ITO employees will give customers special attention as this was very important in the TO industry as shown in Table 18.

7.3.25 Expectation of the ITO to give customers individualised attention

In this study the expectation of ITO to give customers individualised attention [question 5.14 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their level of expectations regarding the expectation of ITO to give customers individualised attention as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 0.8% of the respondents revealed that they strongly disagree to the expectation of ITO will give customers individualised attention while 28.6% strongly agree that they expect ITO will give customers individualised attention as this was very important in the TO industry as shown in Table 18, which was a summary table of the expectations.

Table 18: Expectations of ITO customers

ITO to have modern service equipment [7.3.12]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Disagree	1	0.8	0.8	0.8
	Neutral	6	4.8	4.8	5.6
	Agree	52	41.3	41.3	46.8
	Strongly agree	67	53.2	53.2	100.0
	Total	126	100.0	100.0	
ITO to have clean furniture [7.3.13]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Disagree	1	0.8	0.8	0.8
	Neutral	3	2.4	2.4	3.2
	Agree	52	41.3	41.3	44.4
	Strongly agree	70	55.6	55.6	100.0
	Total	126	100.0	100.0	
ITO employees to have a neat appearance [7.3.14]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Neutral	5	4.0	4.0	4.0
	Agree	40	31.7	31.7	35.7
	Strongly agree	81	64.3	64.3	100.0
	Total	126	100.0	100.0	
Interest in solving customer's problems [7.3.15]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Neutral	3	2.4	2.4	2.4
	Agree	32	25.4	25.4	27.8

	Strongly agree	91	72.2	72.2	100.0
	Total	126	100.0	100.0	
Deliver the services right the first time to customers [7.3.16]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Disagree	1	0,8	0,8	0,8
	Neutral	8	6,3	6,3	7,1
	Agree	66	52,4	52,4	59,5
	Strongly agree	51	40,5	40,5	100,0
	Total	126	100,0	100,0	
Deliver the services to customers in time [7.3.17]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Neutral	4	3,2	3,2	3,2
	Agree	47	37,3	37,3	40,5
	Strongly agree	75	59,5	59,5	100,0
	Total	126	100,0	100,0	
provide customers with the correct bill [7.3.18]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Neutral	5	4,0	4,0	4,0
	Agree	39	31,0	31,0	34,9
	Strongly agree	82	65,1	65,1	100,0
	Total	126	100,0	100,0	
Employees to offer reliable services [7.3.19]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Strongly disagree	1	0,8	0,8	0,8
	Neutral	3	2,4	2,4	3,2
	Agree	54	42,9	42,9	46,0
	Strongly agree	68	54,0	54,0	100,0
	Total	126	100,0	100,0	
ITO employees to give quick service [7.3.20]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Disagree	1	0,8	0,8	0,8

	Neutral	9	7,1	7,1	7,9
	Agree	62	49,2	49,2	57,1
	Strongly agree	54	42,9	42,9	100,0
	Total	126	100,0	100,0	
Employees will greet and welcome customers in a friendly manner [7.3.21]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Strongly disagree	1	0,8	0,8	0,8
	Disagree	1	0,8	0,8	1,6
	Neutral	4	3,2	3,2	4,8
	Agree	50	39,7	39,7	44,4
	Strongly agree	70	55,6	55,6	100,0
	Total	126	100,0	100,0	
ITO employees' behaviour to instil confidence in customers [7.3.22]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Strongly disagree	1	0,8	0,8	0,8
	Disagree	2	1,6	1,6	2,4
	Neutral	7	5,6	5,6	7,9
	Agree	39	31,0	31,0	38,9
	Strongly agree	77	61,1	61,1	100,0
	Total	126	100,0	100,0	
ITO to be trustworthy [7.3.23]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Strongly disagree	2	1,6	1,6	1,6
	Disagree	1	0,8	0,8	2,4
	Neutral	2	1,6	1,6	4,0
	Agree	33	26,2	26,2	30,2
	Strongly agree	88	69,8	69,8	100,0
	Total	126	100,0	100,0	

employees will give customers special attention [7.3.24]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Strongly disagree	1	0,8	0,8	0,8
	Neutral	13	10,3	10,3	11,1
	Agree	54	42,9	42,9	54,0
	Strongly agree	58	46,0	46,0	100,0
	Total	126	100,0	100,0	
ITO to give customers individualised attention [7.3.25]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Strongly disagree	1	0,8	0,8	0,8
	Disagree	3	2,4	2,4	3,2
	Neutral	31	24,6	24,6	27,8
	Agree	55	43,7	43,7	71,4
	Strongly agree	36	28,6	28,6	100,0
	Total	126	100,0	100,0	

Source: Field Data

7.3.26 Perceptions that the ITO has modern service equipment

In this study the customers' perceptions that the ITO has modern service equipment [question 6.1 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their level of appraisal regarding the fact that the ITO had a modern service equipment as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 0.8% of the respondents strongly disagree that the ITO had a modern service equipment while 13.5% strongly agreed that the ITO had a modern service equipment as this was very imperative in the TO industry as shown in Table 19.

7.3.27 Perceptions that the ITO has clean furniture

In this study, the customers' perceptions that the ITO had clean furniture [question 6.2 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their level of appraisal regarding the fact that the ITO has clean furniture as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 5.6% of the respondents strongly disagree that the ITO has clean furniture while 17.5% strongly agree that the ITO had a clean furniture as this was very imperative in the TO industry as shown in Table 19.

7.3.28 Perceptions that the ITO has neat appearing employees

In this study, the customers' perceptions that the ITO has neat appearing employees [question 6.3 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their level of appraisal regarding the fact that the ITO has neat appearing employees as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 0.8% of the respondents strongly disagree that the ITO has neat appearing employees while 22.2% strongly agree that the ITO has neat appearing employees as this was very imperative in the TO industry as shown in Table 19.

7.3.29 Perceptions that the ITO has a sincere interest in solving customer's problems

In this study the customers' perceptions that the ITO has a sincere interest in solving customer's problems [question 6.4 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their level of appraisal regarding the fact that the ITO has a sincere interest in solving customer's problems as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 0.8% of the respondents strongly disagree that the ITO has a sincere interest in solving customers' problems while 19.0% strongly agreed that the ITO had a sincere interest in solving customers' problems as this was very imperative in the TO industry as shown in Table 19.

7.3.30 Perception that the ITO delivers the services right the first time to customer

In this study the customers' perceptions that the ITO delivers the services right the first time to customer [question 6.5 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their level of appraisal regarding the fact that the ITO delivers the services right the first time to customer as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 6.3% of the respondents strongly disagree that the ITO delivers the services right the first time to customer while 13.5% strongly agree that the ITO delivers the services right the first time to customer as this was very imperative in the TO industry as shown in Table 19.

7.3.31 Perception that the ITO delivers the services to customers in time

In this study the customer's perception that the ITO delivers the services to customers in time [question 6.6 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their level of appraisal regarding the fact that the ITO delivers the services to customers in time as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 0.8% of the respondents strongly disagree that the ITO delivers the services to customers in time while 15.9% strongly agree that the ITO delivers the services to customers in time as this was very imperative in the TO industry as shown in Table 19.

7.3.32 Perceptions that the ITO provides customers with the correct bill

In this study the customers' perceptions that the ITO provides customers with the correct bill [question 6.7 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their level of appraisal regarding the fact that the ITO provides customers with the correct bill as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 1.6% of the respondents strongly disagree that the ITO provides customers with the correct bill while 22.2% strongly agree that the ITO provides customers with the correct bill as this was very imperative in the TO industry as shown in Table 19.

7.3.33 Perceptions that the ITO employees offer reliable services

In this study the customers' perceptions that the ITO employees offer reliable services [question 6.8 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their level of appraisal regarding the fact that the ITO employees offer reliable services as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 0.8% of the respondents strongly disagree that the ITO employees offer reliable services while 21.4% strongly agree that the ITO employees offer reliable services as this was very imperative in the TO industry as shown in Table 19.

7.3.34 Perception that the ITO employees give quick service

In this study the customers' perception that the ITO employees give quick service [question 6.9 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point scale ranging from strongly disagreed to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their level of appraisal regarding the fact that the ITO employees give quick service as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 1.6% of the respondents strongly disagree that the ITO employees gave quick service while 17.5% strongly agree that the ITO employees gave quick service as this was very imperative in the TO industry as shown in Table 19.

7.3.35 Perception that the ITO employees greet and welcome customers in a friendly manner

In this study the customers' perceptions that the ITO employees greet and welcome customers in a friendly manner [question 6.10 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their level of appraisal regarding the fact that the ITO employees greet and welcome customers in a friendly manner as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 0.8% of the respondents strongly disagree that the ITO employees greeted and welcomed customers in a friendly manner while 22.2% strongly agreed that the ITO employees greet and welcome customers in a friendly manner as this was very imperative in the TO industry as shown in Table 19.

7.3.36 Perceptions that the ITO employees' behaviour instils confidence in customers

In this study the customers' perceptions that the ITO employees' behaviour instils confidence in customers about the employees [question 6.11 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their level of appraisal regarding the fact that the ITO employees' behaviour instils confidence in customers about the employees as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 1.6% of the respondents strongly disagree that the ITO employees' behaviour instils confidence in customers about the employees while 22.2% strongly agree that the ITO employees' behaviour instils confidence in customers about the employees as this was very imperative in the TO industry as shown in Table 19.

7.3.37 Perception that the ITO is trustworthy

In this study the customer's perception that the ITO is trustworthy [question 6.12 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their level of appraisal regarding the fact that the ITO is trustworthy as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 0.8% of the respondents strongly disagree that the ITO is trustworthy while 20.6% strongly agree that the ITO is trustworthy as this was very imperative in the TO industry as shown in Table 19.

7.3.38 Perceptions that the ITO employees give customers special attention

In this study the customers' perceptions that the ITO employees give customers special attention [question 6.13 of the customer questionnaire] was measured using the five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their level of appraisal regarding the fact that the ITO employees give customers special attention as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 0.8% of the respondents strongly disagree that the ITO employees give customers special attention while 17.5% strongly agree that the ITO employees give customers special attention as this was very imperative in the TO industry as shown in Table 19.

7.3.39 Perceptions that the ITO give customers individualised attention

In this study the customers' perceptions that the ITO give customers individualised attention [question 6.14 of the customer questionnaire] were measured using the five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were required to indicate their level of appraisal regarding the fact that the ITO give customers individualised attention as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 0.8% of the respondents strongly disagree that the ITO give customers individualised attention while 16.7% strongly agree that the ITO give the customer's individualised attention as this was very imperative in the TO industry. Next was a summary table of the customer perceptions.

Table 19: Perceptions of ITO customers

ITO has modern service equipment [7.3.26]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Strongly disagree	1	0,8	0,8	0,8
	Disagree	10	7,9	7,9	8,7
	Neutral	37	29,4	29,4	38,1
	Agree	61	48,4	48,4	86,5
	Strongly agree	17	13,5	13,5	100,0
	Total	126	100,0	100,0	
ITO has clean furniture [7.3.27]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Disagree	7	5,6	5,6	5,6
	Neutral	27	21,4	21,4	27,0
	Agree	70	55,6	55,6	82,5
	Strongly agree	22	17,5	17,5	100,0
	Total	126	100,0	100,0	
ITO has neat appearing employees [7.3.28]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Strongly disagree	1	0,8	0,8	0,8
	Disagree	5	4,0	4,0	4,8
	Neutral	24	19,0	19,0	23,8
	Agree	68	54,0	54,0	77,8
	Strongly agree	28	22,2	22,2	100,0
	Total	126	100,0	100,0	
Sincere interest in solving customer's problems [7.3.29]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Strongly disagree	1	0,8	0,8	0,8
	Disagree	8	6,3	6,3	7,1
	Neutral	29	23,0	23,0	30,2
	Agree	64	50,8	50,8	81,0
	Strongly agree	24	19,0	19,0	100,0
	Total	126	100,0	100,0	

ITO delivers the services right the first time to customer [7.3.30]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Disagree	8	6,3	6,3	6,3
	Neutral	33	26,2	26,2	32,5
	Agree	68	54,0	54,0	86,5
	Strongly agree	17	13,5	13,5	100,0
	Total	126	100,0	100,0	
ITO delivers the services to customers in time [7.3.31]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Strongly disagree	1	0,8	0,8	0,8
	Disagree	10	7,9	7,9	8,7
	Neutral	29	23,0	23,0	31,7
	Agree	66	52,4	52,4	84,1
	Strongly agree	20	15,9	15,9	100,0
	Total	126	100,0	100,0	
ITO provides customers with the correct bill [7.3.32]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Strongly disagree	2	1,6	1,6	1,6
	Disagree	4	3,2	3,2	4,8
	Neutral	33	26,2	26,2	31,0
	Agree	59	46,8	46,8	77,8
	Strongly agree	28	22,2	22,2	100,0
	Total	126	100,0	100,0	
ITO employees offer reliable services [7.3.33]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Strongly disagree	1	0,8	0,8	0,8
	Disagree	3	2,4	2,4	3,2
	Neutral	29	23,0	23,0	26,2
	Agree	66	52,4	52,4	78,6
	Strongly agree	27	21,4	21,4	100,0
	Total	126	100,0	100,0	

ITO employees give quick service [7.3.34]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Strongly disagree	2	1,6	1,6	1,6
	Disagree	5	4,0	4,0	5,6
	Neutral	37	29,4	29,4	34,9
	Agree	60	47,6	47,6	82,5
	Strongly agree	22	17,5	17,5	100,0
	Total	126	100,0	100,0	

ITO employees greet and welcome customers in a friendly manner [7.3.35]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Strongly disagree	1	0,8	0,8	0,8
	Disagree	8	6,3	6,3	7,1
	Neutral	20	15,9	15,9	23,0
	Agree	69	54,8	54,8	77,8
	Strongly agree	28	22,2	22,2	100,0
	Total	126	100,0	100,0	

ITO employees' behaviour instils confidence in customers [7.3.36]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Strongly disagree	2	1,6	1,6	1,6
	Disagree	6	4,8	4,8	6,3
	Neutral	29	23,0	23,0	29,4
	Agree	61	48,4	48,4	77,8
	Strongly agree	28	22,2	22,2	100,0
	Total	126	100,0	100,0	

ITO is trustworthy [7.3.37]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Strongly disagree	1	0,8	0,8	0,8
	Disagree	3	2,4	2,4	3,2
	Neutral	32	25,4	25,4	28,6
	Agree	64	50,8	50,8	79,4

	Strongly agree	26	20,6	20,6	100,0
	Total	126	100,0	100,0	
ITO employees give customers special attention [7.3.38]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Strongly disagree	1	0,8	0,8	0,8
	Disagree	7	5,6	5,6	6,3
	Neutral	32	25,4	25,4	31,7
	Agree	64	50,8	50,8	82,5
	Strongly agree	22	17,5	17,5	100,0
	Total	126	100,0	100,0	
ITO give customers individualised attention [7.3.39]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Strongly disagree	1	0,8	0,8	0,8
	Disagree	12	9,5	9,5	10,3
	Neutral	39	31,0	31,0	41,3
	Agree	53	42,1	42,1	83,3
	Strongly agree	21	16,7	16,7	100,0
	Total	126	100,0	100,0	

Source: Field Data

7.3.40 ITO service quality evaluation

The ITO service quality evaluation in this study referred to the difference between expected and perceived service. Grönroos (1984) pioneered a construct for the evaluation of the service quality in which there were three service quality elements identified. From the value-based definition of service quality by Wyclof (1984), Parasuraman et al. (1985) established the GAP model revealed by five gaps which focused on the service quality dimensions that became the universally accepted framework for assessing the service quality. Of interest to this study was the 5th gap model which was the contrast between the service expectations and service perceptions of the customer. Grapentine (1988) and Parasuraman et al. in their research conducted between 1985 - 1988 took keen interest in Gap 5 (expected vs. perceived service gap). In their 1988 publication in the *Journal of Retailing (JR)* article, the equation $Q = P - E$

was developed and empirically put into use. The GAP model built on the theory of expectation-confirmation developed by Oliver (1980) which postulated that service quality was defined as that existing space of a service expectation and perception delivered to the customer.

Service quality and customer satisfaction had about the same conceptualisation which was the difference between the expectations and the experiences (Choo, Cheng, & Yeo, 2018; Sam, Hamidu & Daniels, 2018; Baker & Crompton, 2000). Most research studies on service quality and customer satisfaction applied the disconfirmation paradigm. This paradigm was an approach in which satisfaction resulted from the customer's comparison of their perception of a service performance and the expectations (Oliver & DeSarbo, 1988). The disconfirmation paradigm applied in this study also examined and measured service quality as the difference between service perception and service expectation.

In this study the customer service quality centred around the following items: ITO having modern office equipment; clean furniture; neat appearing employees; a sincere interest in solving customer's problems; delivering the services right the first time to customers; delivering the services to customers in time; provide customers with the correct bill; employees offering reliable services; employees giving quick service; employees greet and welcome customers in a friendly manner; employees' behaviour instils confidence in customers about them; trustworthiness; employees give customers special attention and customers are given individualised attention. The findings from the empirical quantitative analysis of this study showed that the total perception [P = 3.81] and the total expectation [E = 4.46]. From the equation $Q=P-E$, the service quality value was [Q = -0.65]. This was illustrated in Table 20. This was interpreted to mean that the service quality perception was lower than the service quality expectation. Hence, poor service quality existed in the ITO service quality industry in Cameroon. This showed a real need for service quality improvement.

Table 20: ITO service quality evaluation

Item	Perception	Expectation	Difference (P-E)
ITO to have modern equipment	3.66	4.47	-0.8
ITO to have clean furniture	3.85	4.52	-0.67
ITO employees to have clean appearance	3.93	4.60	-0.67
ITO to have a sincere interest in solving customer’s problem	3.81	4.70	-0.89
ITO to deliver services right the first time to customers	3.75	4.33	-0.58
ITO to deliver services to customers in time	3.75	4.56	-0.81
ITO to provide customer with the correct bill	3.85	4.61	-0.76
ITO employees to offer reliable services	3.91	4.49	-0.58
ITO employees to give quick service	3.75	4.34	-0.59
ITO 4. will greet and welcome customers in a friendly manner	3.91	4.48	-0.57
ITO employees’ behaviour to instil confidence in customers about the employee	3.85	4.50	.-0.65
ITO should be trustworthy	3.88	4.62	-0.74
ITO employees will give customers special attention	3.79	4.33	-0.54
ITO will give customers individualised attention	3.64	3.97	-0.33
Total	3.81	4.46	-0.65

Item	**Perception**	**Expectation**	**Difference (P-E)**
ITO to have modern equipment	3.66	4.47	-0.8
ITO to have clean furniture	3.85	4.52	-0.67
ITO employees to have clean	3.93	4.60	-0.67

appearance			
ITO to have a sincere interest in solving customer's problem	3.81	4.70	-0.89
ITO to deliver services right the first time to customers	3.75	4.33	-0.58
ITO to deliver services to customers in time	3.75	4.56	-0.81
ITO to provide customer with the correct bill	3.85	4.61	-0.76
ITO employees to offer reliable services	3.91	4.49	-0.58
ITO employees to give quick service	3.75	4.34	-0.59
ITO 4. will greet and welcome customers in a friendly manner	3.91	4.48	-0.57
ITO employees' behaviour to instil confidence in customers about the employee	3.85	4.50	.-0.65
ITO should be trustworthy	3.88	4.62	-0.74
ITO employees will give customers special attention	3.79	4.33	-0.54
ITO will give customers individualised attention	3.64	3.97	-0.33
Total	3.81	4.46	-0.65

Source: Field Data

7.4 RESULTS OF DATA MANAGEMENT AND CLEANING PROCESS

This study was operationalised into five independent exogenous variables: empathy, assurance, responsiveness, reliability and tangibility while service quality evaluation was operationalised as endogenous dependent variable. As observed in the study, data management procedures for the test of validity and reliability measurements were conducted for the customer respondents as presented in the next section.

7.4.1 Results of the test of validity and reliability measurement (VRM)

It was appropriate to ensure that the degree of validity and credibility of the research instruments were suitable to test the hypotheses. In line with scientific research, validity measured the degree to which constructs measured what they were supposed to measure (Weber, 2004; Sarantokos, 1997; Whichard, 2006; Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:28) or the level to which the measure of truth was valid in a theory (Quinlan, et al., 2015:24). To this effect, construct validity was conducted to assess the degree to which the research constructs actually measured the theoretical constructs and explained results that were consistent with the literature (Sarantakos, 2005).

Similarly, reliability test was considered. The theoretical premise of reliability was anchored on the ability of consistency, stability and repeatability of data collection instrument to produce reliable and consistent results (Hair et al., 2010; Leedy and Ormrod, 2010:93; Quinlan et al., 2015:24). This test was completed using the Cronbach alpha coefficient. The Cronbach alpha measured the level of consistency of the scale of measurement of research constructs (Field, 2009). Constructs with coefficients below the threshold of 0.70 as guided by (Nunnally, 1978) were dropped. However, it was noted that the test of validity and reliability were based on only retained constructs observed in the study. Table 21 showed validity for all constructs involved in the proposed model and it was deduced that all the constructs were reliable.

Table 21: Test of Reliability Using Cronbach Alpha

Latent constructs	Cronbach Alpha	Cronbach Alpha Based on Standardised Items	Sample size	No of items	Status
Empathy	0.746	0.747	126	2	Reliable
Assurance	0.876	0.876	126	2	Reliable
Responsiveness	0.858	0.858	126	3	Reliable
Tangibility	0.864	0.864	126	3	Reliable
Service Quality Evaluation	0.944	0.945	126	14	Reliable

Source: Field Data

7.5 PARAMETRIC ASSUMPTIONS

Given the conceptualisation of this study and the mode of analysis supported by the test of hypotheses, it was incumbent to conduct appropriate test of parametric assumption. Specific assumptions tested included multivariate normality of the distribution of the data, homogeneity of variance, linearity of the data and multi-collinearity using procedures prescribed by Field (2005).

7.5.1 Identification of outliers and treatment

Outliers in this study were observation points but not representative of the population. They were present irrespective of the size of the data set. An outlier is a phenomenon that represented the occurrence of unusual pattern of certain data point to be extreme from other similar data points in a given data set (Hair et al., 2010). Outliers can take mild or extreme positions, but their effects remain the same. A data point observed beyond an inner fence or boundary was theoretically considered to be a mild outlier. On the other hand, data point far and beyond an outer fence or boundary was theoretically considered as an extreme outlier. Irrespective of their positions and nomenclature, outliers are terribly dangerous to exist in any data set.

It was premised that the occurrence of outliers is owing to the variability in the measurement of constructs or may result from issues of experimental mistakes or errors. Owing to their high negative influence, outliers must be treated scientifically prior to the analysis of data and test of hypotheses. The base for conducting these tests was to improve on the results by reducing bias of the mean and reducing the inflation of the standard deviation caused by random extreme data points. Any item that had observations outside the threshold of ±3 were converted to the nearest observation and in some cases replaced by the mean score of the sample.

Outliers were perceived to be more problematic and adversely affect statistical tests (Field, 2009). There were several techniques to identify and treat this phenomenon. Such techniques included scatter plots graphs, box plot interquartile range approach and standardised residual method. Equally, other similar measurement of outliers included the Cook's Distant Coefficient. The Cook's Distant coefficient must be greater than 1 to indicate the presence of outliers in the data set. In the case of the Inter-Quartile Range (IQR) approach, any item which laid out of the IQR was identified as an outlier. To this effect, outliers were identified and treated in this study using the box plot interquartile range approach as shown below:

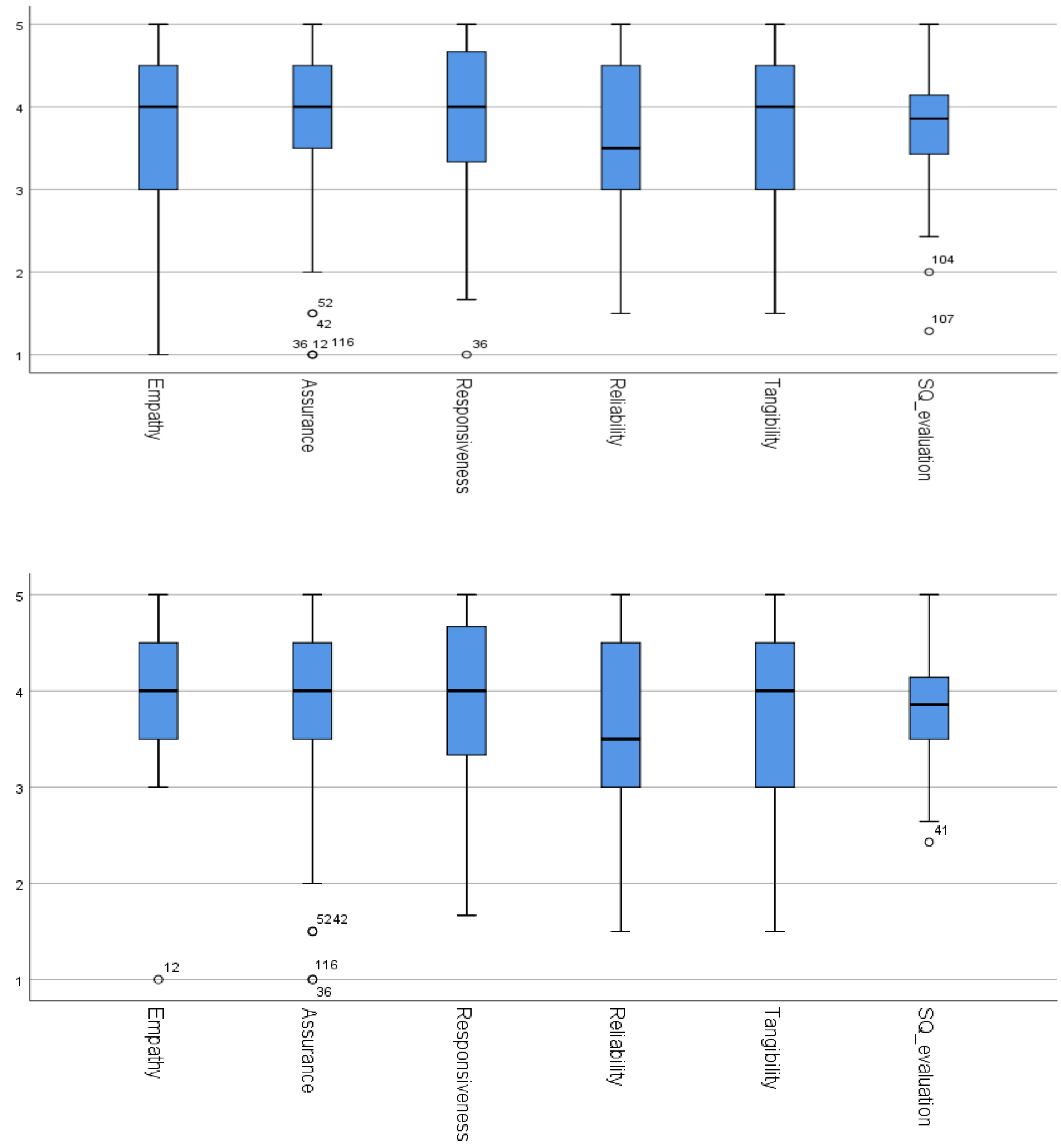


Figure 32: Outliers Identification using Box Plot Method

Source: Field Data

All data points outside the boxplots were theoretically considered as outliers. In parametric analysis, all outliers were treated to produce credible and reliable results from the test of hypotheses. The existence of outliers in the data gave the possibility to generate misleading outcomes and false interpretations.

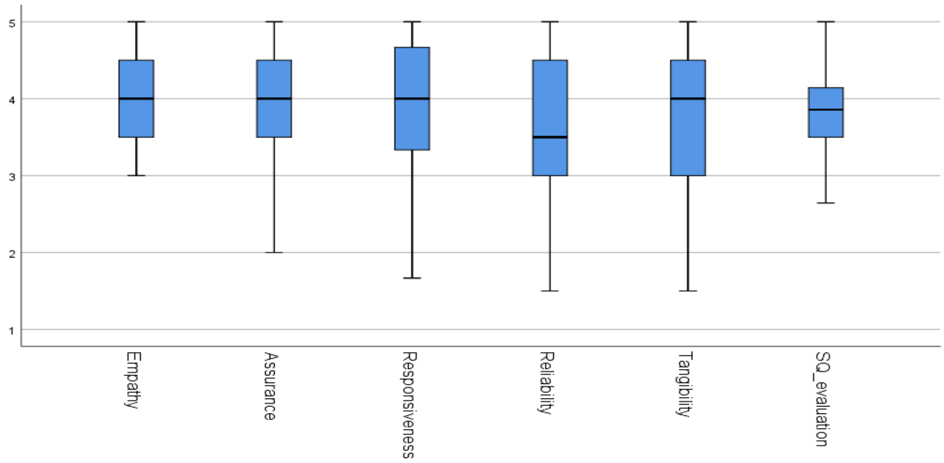


Figure 33: Histograms and Probability-Probability (P-P)
Source: Field Data

As explained earlier, items that had observations outside the threshold of ±3 were treated by replacing the data points with their respective arithmetic mean. Figure 33 showed no data point outside the boxplots. This was evidence that the data was cleaned up from the outliers.

7.6 MULTIVARIATE NORMALITY TEST

7.6.1 Measures of skewness and kurtosis

A distribution of data was considered to follow a normal distribution if the coeficient of both the skewness and kurtosis statistics were zero or approximated to zero (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). A common strategy to identify normality in the distribution was to conduct the test of skewness [symmetrical] and kurtosis [Peakedness] for each measured variable (Field, 2005). As premised by Black et al. (1990), a suitable coeficient for kurtosis statistics should be between -5 - +5. The measurement of the test statistics for skewness was premised to be between -3 - +3. To this effect, the test for multivariate normality in this study was carried out using both visual and numerical techniques. The tests for skewness (symmetry) and kurtosis (peakedness) were conducted (Field, 2009). The results from the other tests for normality were presented next. Based on the outcome of the analysis of the aforementioned test, it was observed that all coeficients of the test statistics were appropriate for multivaraite normality [-3 and +3].

Table 22: Measures of Skewness and Kurtosis

Descriptive statistics									
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Empathy	126	3.00	5.00	3.9246	.66533	.140	.216	-.979	.428
Assurance	126	2.00	5.00	4.0317	.74926	-.267	.216	-.713	.428
Responsive	126	1.67	5.00	3.8265	.87494	-.517	.216	-.435	.428
Reliability	126	1.50	5.00	3.7381	.84785	-.279	.216	-.496	.428
Tangibility	126	1.50	5.00	3.7659	.89149	-.367	.216	-.368	.428
Service Qual.	126	2.64	5.00	3.8549	.55049	.152	.216	-.347	.428
Valid N (listwise)	126								

Source: Field Data

The coefficient of skewness for empathy, assurance, responsiveness, reliability, tangibility and service quality evaluation were all within the range +/- 1 therefore indicating normally distributed data sets. Equally, the kurtosis statistics for the latent construct: empathy, assurance, responsiveness, reliability, tangibility, and service quality evaluation were within +/-2, therefore, indicating a normal distribution.

7.6.2 Testing for Normality using Histograms and Probability-Probability (P-P) Plots

A normal distribution was confirmed by a fairly straight line presented by the normal P-P plot, the bell-shaped histogram and the range of ± 2.5 data distribution. The plotting of the observed values of a data set alongside their respective frequency distribution could depict which histogram represented normality (Peat & Barton, 2005). The histogram usually followed a bell-shaped distribution of data points into a normal curve graph for the dependent variable, therefore indicating a normal distribution. Both the P-P plot and Q-Q plot always approximated into straight line to constitute a normal distribution (Field, 2009).

Based on the outputs, there was no significant deviation of any data points far from the diagonal lines thus the assumption of normality was achieved.

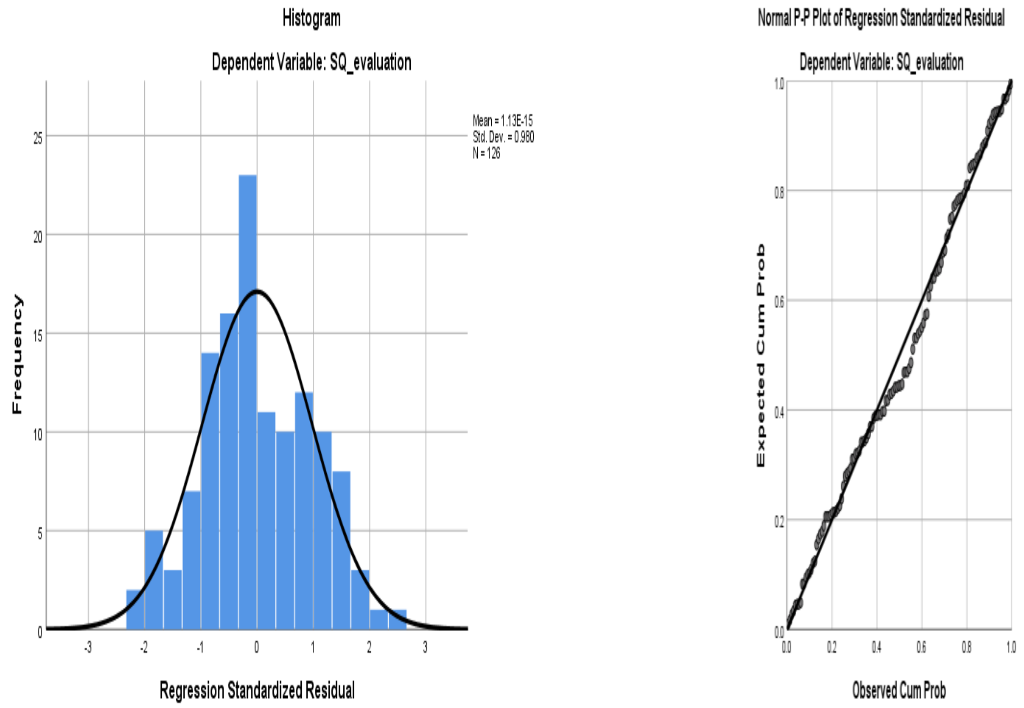


Figure 34: Histograms and Probability-Probability (P-P)
Source: Field Data

7.6.3 Multicollinearity tests

According to Hair et al., (2010), multicollinearity occurred when one independent variable was highly consistent with others or fully blended with other variables to constitute a single variable. Equally, multicollinearity occurred when a significantly high correlation existed among two or more independent variables. The occurrence of multicollinearity in the analysis of data had the tendency to increase the standard errors and therefore lowered the power of prediction of the respective independent variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). In this study, multicollinearity was assessed using both the Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). Table 23 showed that multicollinearity did not exist among the independent latent constructs as VIF were all < 10 and tolerance > 0.1. According to Hair et al. (2011), no evidence of multicollinearity existed as shown in Table 23 for all the five specific latent constructs involving empathy, assurance, responsiveness, reliability and tangibility.

Table 23: Multicollinearity Test – VIF and Tolerance Tests

Coefficients[a]										
Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	2.626	.276		9.514	.000	2.079	3.172		
	Empathy	.116	.102	.140	1.143	.255	-.085	.317	.429	2.330
	Assurance	-.074	.106	-.100	-.692	.491	-.284	.137	.309	3.237
	Responsive	.253	.086	.401	2.935	.004	.082	.423	.346	2.893
	Reliability	-.059	.080	-.090	-.733	.465	-.217	.100	.427	2.340
	Tangibility	.086	.084	.139	1.014	.313	-.082	.253	.346	2.891
a. Dependent Variable: SQ_evaluation										

Source: Field Data

7.6.4 Results of the homogeneity of variance test

7.6.4.1 Results of Levene test

Homoscedasticity of variance occurred when the dependent variable demonstrated equal levels of variance across the different independent variables in a data set (Pallant, 2010). Moreover, homogeneity of variance was important in data analysis in that the variance of the error terms of the dependent variable should not be concentrated in only a limited number of the independent variables (Hair et al., 2010). In this study, the Levene test was used to assess the null hypothesis of equal variance dispersion. Field (2009) and Pallant (2010) recommended that if the test statistics of the Levene test was non-significant [p >.05], then it was premised that the data are homogeneous, therefore upholding to the homogeneity of variance statistical assumption as shown next (Field 2009).

Table 24: Levene's Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
								95% Confidence Interval of the difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Empathy	1.344	0.249	-0.772	124	0.442	-0.12052	0.15612	-0.42953	0.18850
			-0.734	69.845	0.465	-0.12052	0.16417	-0.44795	0.20692
Assurance	0.123	0.726	-1.037	124	0.302	-0.18407	0.17753	-0.53546	0.16731
			-1.044	80.620	0.299	-0.18407	0.17625	-0.53478	0.16663
Responsiveness	0.570	0.452	-0.770	124	0.443	-0.13352	0.17340	-0.47673	0.20968
			-0.800	87.427	0.426	-0.13352	0.16688	-0.46519	0.19815
Reliability	1.521	0.220	-1.290	124	0.199	-0.20746	0.16079	-0.52570	0.11078
			-1.370	92.517	0.174	-0.20746	0.15144	-0.50822	0.09330
Tangibility	2.501	0.116	-1.196	124	0.234	-0.20244	0.16922	-0.53737	0.13249
			-1.278	94.083	0.204	-0.20244	0.15836	-0.51687	0.11199
SQ_evaluation	0.517	0.473	-0.940	124	0.349	-0.11275	0.11993	-0.35012	0.12463
			-0.998	92.377	0.321	-0.11275	0.11303	-0.33722	0.11172

Source: Field Data

7.6.4.2 Results of Scatter Plot

The scatter plot technique was equally used to illustrate that the error terms of the dependent variable was consistently distributed across all independent variables observed in the analysis of customer respondents. As shown next, there was no grouping of data points, therefore indicate equality of variance.

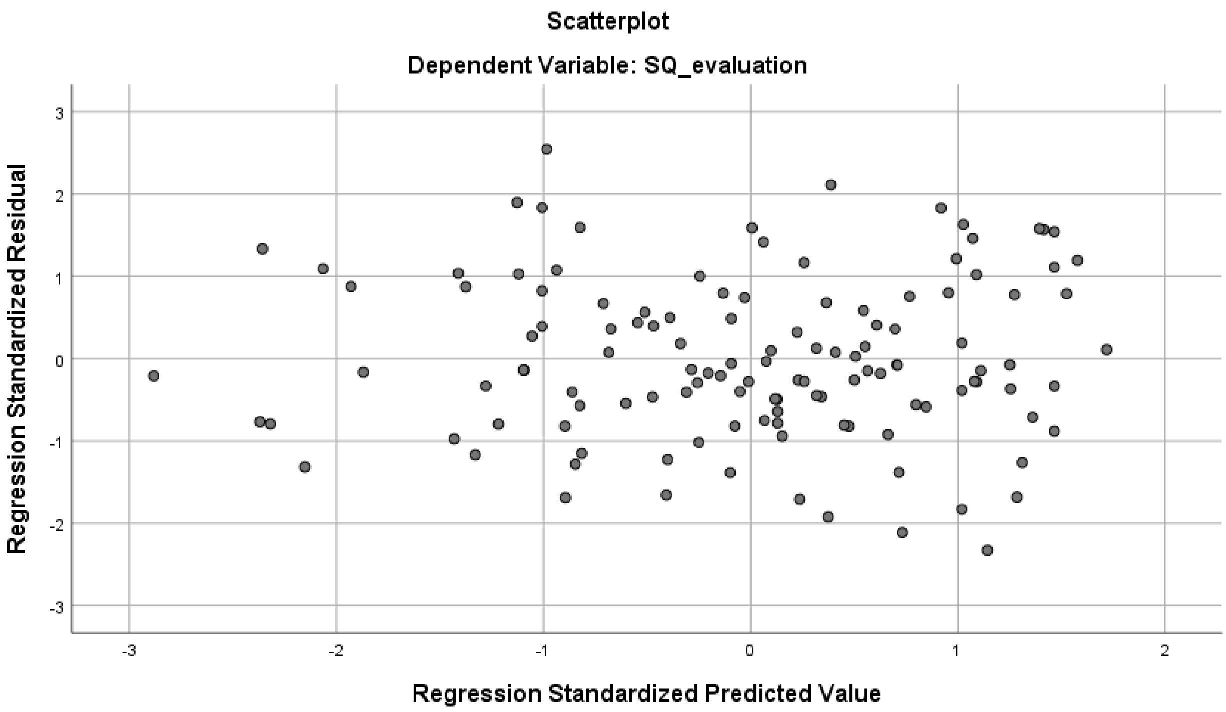


Figure 35: Scatter Plot
Source: Field Data

7.7 INFERENTIAL ANALYSIS [PEARSON PRODUCT-MOMENT CORRELATION]

In the analysis and test of hypothesis, inferential analysis via the Pearson product-moment correlation also known as Pearson moment correlation was used to confirm or reject the following hypothetical relationships

I. **H_1:** Empathy has a positive and significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.
II. **H_2:** Assurance has a positive and significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.
III. **H_3:** Responsiveness has a positive and significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.
IV. **H_4:** Reliability has a positive and significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.

V. H_5: Tangibility has a positive and significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.

Table 25: Pearson Moment Correlation

Correlations

		SQ_evaluation	Empathy	Assurance	Responsiveness	Reliability	Tangibility
Pearson Correlation	SQ evaluation	1.000	.325	.323	.456	.286	.385
	Empathy	.325	1.000	.749	.581	.537	.543
	Assurance	.323	.749	1.000	.710	.628	.647
	Responsive	.456	.581	.710	1.000	.657	.746
	Reliability	.286	.537	.628	.657	1.000	.717
	Tangibility	.385	.543	.647	.746	.717	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	SQ evaluation	.	.000	.000	.000	.001	.000
	Empathy	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.000
	Assurance	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000
	Responsive	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000
	Reliability	.001	.000	.000	.000	.	.000
	Tangibility	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.
N	SQ evaluation	126	126	126	126	126	126
	Empathy	126	126	126	126	126	126
	Assurance	126	126	126	126	126	126
	Responsive	126	126	126	126	126	126
	Reliability	126	126	126	126	126	126
	Tangibility	126	126	126	126	126	126

Source: Field Data

Summary of Results

Table 26: Summary of results

Hypotheses	**P-Value at 95% (CI)**	**Conclusion**
H_1: Empathy has a positive significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation,	[H_0: $\mu = 0.000 < 0.05$, $\beta = 0.325$].	Reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there was significant statistical evidence to suggest that Empathy had a positive significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation,
H_2: Assurance has a positive significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation,	[H_0: $\mu = 0.000 < 0.05$, $\beta = 0.323$]	Reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there was significant statistical evidence to suggest that Assurance had a positive significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation
H_3: Responsiveness has a positive significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.	[H_0: $\mu = 0.000 < 0.05$, $\beta = 0.456$]	Reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is significant statistical evidence to suggest that Responsiveness had a positive significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.
H_4: Reliability has a positive significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.	[H_0: $\mu = 0.001 < 0.05$, $\beta = 0.286$]	Reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there was significant statistical evidence to suggest that Reliability had a positive significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.
H_5: Tangibility has a positive significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.	[H_0: $\mu = 0.000 < 0.05$, $\beta = 0.385$]	Reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there was significant statistical evidence to suggest that Tangibility has a positive significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.

Source: Field Data

7.8 MULTIPLE REGRESSION HYPOTHESES TESTING

After estimating the measurement models and addressing the assumptions for parametric analysis, multiple regression analyses were run to determine the causal relationships between the variables of the study in line with the hypotheses of the study.

I. **H_1:** Empathy has a positive and significant effect on Service Quality Evaluation.
II. **H_2:** Assurance has a positive and significant effect on Service Quality Evaluation.
III. **H_3:** Responsiveness has a positive and significant effect on Service Quality Evaluation.
IV. **H_4:** Reliability has a positive and significant effect on Service Quality Evaluation.
V. **H_5:** Tangibility has a positive and significant effect on Service Quality Evaluation.

Based on the regression model, five specific independent latent constructs were tested in hypothetical relations with service quality evaluation as shown next.

Table 27: Multiple Regression Hypotheses Testing

Variables Entered/Removed[a]			
Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Tangibility, Empathy, Reliability, Responsiveness, and Assurance[b]	.	Enter
a. Dependent Variable: SQ evaluation			
b. All requested variables entered.			

Source: Field Data

Based on the analysis of the regression model, the overall predictive power of the model as revealed by the coefficient of Adjusted R Square = 0.195 implies that the predictors in the model relating to Tangibility, Empathy, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance accounted for 20% of the variation caused on Service Quality Evaluation with Std. Error of the Estimate = 0.49388 as shown next.

Table 28: Model Summary

Model Summary[b]				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.477[a]	.227	.195	.49388

a. Predictors: (Constant), tangibility, empathy, reliability, responsiveness, assurance
b. Dependent Variable: SQ evaluation

Source: Field Data

To ascertain the suitability of the model, ANOVA analysis was conducted and the test of model fit revealed that at regression model 1, with Sum of Squares = 8.488, Degree of Freedom = 5, F-Test = 6.930, and Mean= 1.698 showed that the model was statistically significant and thus the data fits the model at P-V = 0.000 as shown next.

Table 29: ANOVA

ANOVA[a]						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	8.488	5	1.698	6.930	.000[b]
	Residual	29.393	120	.245		
	Total	37.880	125			
a. Dependent Variable: SQ_evaluation						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Tangibility, Empathy, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance						

Source: Field Data

Based on the test of hypotheses, the study revealed that tangibility [μ = 0.313 > 0.05], empathy [μ = 0.255 > 0.05], reliability [μ = 0.465 > 0.05], and assurance [μ = 0.491 > 0.05] have statistically insignificant influences on Service Quality Evaluation whereas there was significant statistical evidence that responsiveness influences Service Quality Evaluation [μ = 0.004 < 0.05; β = 0.0401] as shown next.

Table 30: Coefficients

Coefficients[a]										
		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients			95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Statistics	
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	2.626	.276		9.514	.000	2.079	3.172		
	Empathy	.116	.102	.140	1.143	.255	-.085	.317	.429	2.330
	Assurance	-.074	.106	-.100	-.692	.491	-.284	.137	.309	3.237
	Responsiveness	.253	.086	.401	2.935	.004	.082	.423	.346	2.893
	Reliability	-.059	.080	-.090	-.733	.465	-.217	.100	.427	2.340

	Tangibility	.086	.084	.139	1.014	.313	-.082	.253	.346	2.891
a. Dependent Variable: SQ evaluation										

Source: Field Data

Summary of results

Table 31: Summary of results

Hypotheses	P-Value at 95% (CI)	Decision / Conclusion
H_1: Empathy has a positive significant effect on Service Quality Evaluation.	[H_0 : μ= .255 > 0.05, β = 0.14, CI =95%] Weak positive statistically significant.	Decline to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is insignificant statistical evidence to suggest that empathy has a positive significant effect on Service Quality Evaluation.
H_2: Assurance has a positive significant effect on Service Quality Evaluation.	[H_0: μ= 0.491 > 0.05, β = -0.1, CI =95%]. Weak negative statistically insignificant.	Decline to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is insignificant statistical evidence to suggest that assurance has a positive significant effect on Service Quality Evaluation.
H_3: Responsiveness has a positive significant effect on Service Quality Evaluation.	[H_0: μ= 0.004 < 0.05, β = 0.401, CI =95%]. Weak positive statistically significant.	Decline to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is insignificant statistical evidence to suggest that responsiveness has a positive significant effect on Service Quality Evaluation.
H_4: Reliability has a positive significant effect on Service Quality Evaluation,	[H_0: μ= 0.465 > 0.05, β = -0.090, CI =95%]. Weak negative statistically insignificant.	Decline to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is insignificant statistical evidence to suggest that reliability has a positive significant effect on Service Quality Evaluation.
H_5: Tangibility has a positive significant effect on Service Quality Evaluation,	[H_0: μ= 0.313 > 0.05, β = 0.139, CI =95%]. Weak negative statistically insignificant.	Decline to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is insignificant statistical evidence to suggest that tangibility has a positive significant effect on Service Quality Evaluation.

Source: Field Data

B. ANALYSIS PRESENTATION OF MANAGER RESPONDENTS

7.9 Descriptive statistics of manager respondents

Descriptive statistics described the typical properties of the sample collected (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:187). In this study, frequencies, means and standard deviations were applied to explain the outcome of the study (Cooper & Schindler, 2014:401) and tables and graphs used for illustrations. This section B of the chapter relates to the analysis of the manager questionnaire [Annexure F] response rate and demographic information of the respondents of this study. The manager respondents form part of group I participants in this study. It was noteworthy that the employee respondents forming the other part of the group I participants because of the very small number of responses collected from the field [n=5] were not analysed by the statistician. The next paragraph was an analytical presentation of the demography of the manager respondents.

7.9.1 Demographic information of manager respondents

The distribution of participants' information and demographic characteristics was used to ensure that the sample frame was appropriate for the study. The measurement criteria for demographic information were based on categorical nominal and binary data. These parameters included gender of participants = [Female] and [Male], Age group of participants = [18 – 20], [21 – 30], [31 – 40], [41 – 50], and [51 – 65] and how long have they been employed with this ITO [< 2 years], and [> 2 years]. These were based on the questions in the manager questionnaire [Appendix F].

7.9.1.1 Gender of manager respondents

As observed in the study, gender was both female and male considerations. The measurement was binary categorical data. The gender representation consisted of eight males and four females representing a sample of 12 respondents. Based on the gender distribution provided, there were more males [66.7%] than females [33.3%]. The issue of gender discrimination was not observed as the sample frame constituted an appropriate representation of both sexes of the target population. The inclusion of gender considerations goes a long way to enhance the validity and reliability of the study even though some respondents did not feel comfortable expressing their gender preference but preferred to stay quiet. In this light, it was evident to suggest that the sample was representative and appropriate for analysis and as such the analysis was not gender bias as shown in Table 32.

7.9.1.2 Age of manager respondents

The distribution of participants by age was a vital demographic characteristic to ensure valid and appropriate responses. In this study, age was measured using non-categorical data ranging from [18 – 20], [21 – 30], [31 – 40], [41 – 50] and [50 – 65]. The population of service providers in the TO industry ranges from teenagers to adults. To this effect, opinions of all strata of participants based on age were considered in the data collection and analysis processes. This, therefore, mitigates any possibility of bias response. Majority of the participants were between the ages of [31-40 years] representing 50% of the total respondents. The tests of hypotheses were a blend of opinions of different participants based on the following age specifications shown in Table 32.

7.9.1.3 Length of time with ITO

Service experience related to the number of years of active service [how long have you been] put into the industry. It was important for respondents to possess the appropriate level of industrial knowledge and skills to be considered suitable for the study. In this study the measurement of how long you have been employed with this ITO was based on two categories: [less than two years], and [more than two years]. All of the manager respondents analysed were employed for more than two years with the ITO, with a majority being those who have been employed with five years as seen in the next table. One missing data was recorded. Based on this outcome, the number of years spent with the ITO was appropriate as the sample frame is a representation of the population consisting of participants whose length of time with the ITO exceeds more than two years. The opinions of all strata of participants based on years employed at the ITO for the aforementioned categories were considered in the data collection and analysis process as shown in Table 32.

7.9.1.4 Position at the ITO

The different categories of positions presented in the manager survey questionnaire for the question “what position do you currently hold within the organisation “included the following categories: frontline manager; mid-level manager and senior manager. Of the 12 respondents, seven were senior level managers [58.3%]; two were mid-level managers [16.7%] and three were frontline managers [25%]. This was illustrated in the next table. This representation painted a clear picture that the ideas and opinions communicated in this survey were that of seasoned tourism professionals that counted within the present context. This was shown in Table 32.

7.9.1.5 Length of stay in that position

“How long have you worked in that duty position” was the question that sought answers from manager respondents. The respondents’ answers were varied and spread out based on their levels of professional experience ranging from two years to 26 years. The frequency of responses was fairly distributed and representative of the different experience levels of all participants ranging between 1; 2 and 4. The highest frequency was 3 representing 25% of the total frequency meanwhile the lowest frequencies are 9, 10 and 26 years each representing 8.3%. It was evident from these statistics that the more experience was acquired, the fewer the number of managers present in the TO industry in Cameroon. This was shown in Table 32.

Table 32: Demographic data of manager respondents

Q1. Gender	Male	8	66.7%
	Female	4	33.3%
	Total	12	100.0%
		Number of observations	Percentage
Q2. Age of respondents	21-30	1	8.3%
	31-40	6	50%
	41-50	3	25%
	50-65	2	16.7%
	Total	12	100.0%
		Number of	%

		Number of observations	%
Q3. How long have you been using ITO services?	2 years	2	16.7%
	5 years	4	33.3%
	7 years	1	8.3%
	8 years	1	8.3%
	10 years	1	8.3%
	12 years	2	16.7%
	26 years	1	8.3%
	Total	12	100.0%

		Number of observations	%
Q4. What position do you currently hold within the organisation	Frontline manager	3	25%
	Mid-level manager	2	16.7%
	Senior manager	7	58.3%
	Total	12	100%

		Frequency	Percentage
Q5. How long have you worked in this position	2	2	16.7
	3	2	16.7
	5	3	25
	8	2	16.7
	9	1	8.3
	10	1	8.3
	26	1	8.3
	Total	12	100.0

Source: Field Data

7.10 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICAL PRESENTATION OF THE CONSTRUCTS OF THE STUDY

In this section descriptive statistics of the data analysis are reported in sections 7.3.1 to 7.3.11. The five observed independent latent constructs of the study were empathy, assurance, responsiveness, reliability and tangibility while Service Quality Evaluation was considered as the one dependent latent construct. These constructs were operationalised using five latent dependent constructs, one independent latent construct and 11 service quality determinant factors in the TO industry in Cameroon [hospitality, value for money, safety and security, tour quality, ability to resolve problems, use of technology, time management, price, communication and information, hygiene and sanitation, logistics and amenities] to measure the levels of service perception and service expectation as revealed by manager respondents in the study using different scales structures as shown below. This section addressed the following secondary objectives of this study:

I. To identify the service quality determinant factors unique to the ITO industry.
II. To evaluate the effects of customer service quality expectation on service quality in the ITO industry.
III. To examine the effects of customer service quality perception on service quality in the ITO industry.

The next section presented and discussed detailed descriptive statistics from the manager questionnaire of the 11 service quality determinant factors in the ITO industry, with special focus on the service quality perception and expectation.

7.10.1 Perceived response rate of hospitality

In this study TO service quality was operationalised using the hospitality item [question 4.1 of the manager questionnaire] which was measured using the five-point likert scale ranging from 1[Least important] to 5 [Most Important]. Apparently one scale was considered missing owing to wrong data entry. Manager respondents were required to indicate the perceived level of hospitality as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 8.3% of the respondents showed that hospitality was least important compared to 25.0 % who considered hospitality as somewhat very important. One missing data was identified and considered minimal [7.7 %]. A combined number of respondents [83.3%] were affirmative that hospitality was important for the ITO industry in Cameroon as shown in Table 33.

7.10.2 Perceived level of value for money

In this study service quality was equally operationalised using the perceived value for money [question 4.2 of the manager questionnaire] item which was measured using the 5 scales ranging from least important to most important. However, three scales were considered missing owing to wrong data entry. The valid responses were for least important and most important. Manager respondents were required to indicate their perceived level of value for money as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 8.3% of the respondents revealed that value for money was least important while 8.3% revealed that value for money was most important. One missing data was identified and considered minimal [7.7 %]. A combined number of 58.3% were affirmative that value for money counts and was important for the ITO industry in Cameroon as shown in Table 33.

7.10.3 The perceived level of safety and security

In addition, as observed in this study, service quality was also operationalised using the perceived level of safety and security [question 4.3 of the manager questionnaire] which was measured using the five-point scales ranging from 1 [least important] to 5 [most important]. However, two scales were considered missing owing to no data entry. The valid responses were for least important and most important. Manager respondents were required to indicate their perceived level of safety and security as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 18.2% of the respondents observed that safety and security was least important while 63.6% revealed that safety and security was most important in the TO industry as shown in Table 33.

7.10.4 The perceived level of tour quality

The tour quality item [question 4.4 of the manager questionnaire] was also considered as relevant measurement of service quality. It was measured using the five-point likert scales ranging from 1 [least important] to 5 [most important]. However, two scales were considered missing owing to no data entry for 1 and 2. The valid responses were for 3, 4 and most important. Respondents were required to indicate their perceived level of tour quality as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 25.0% of the participants responded that tour quality was important while 41.7 % revealed that tour quality was most important in the TO industry in Cameroon as shown in Table 33.

7.10.5 Ability to resolve problems

In this study service quality was operationalised using the ability to resolve problems [question 4.5 of the manager questionnaire] which was measured using the five-point likert scale ranging from 1 [least important] to 5 [most important]. However, one scale (least important) was considered missing owing to no data entry. The valid responses were for scale 2, 3, 4 and most important. Manager respondents were required to indicate their level for understanding on the ability to resolve problems as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 8.3% of the respondents revealed that ability to resolve problems was least important while 33.3 % revealed that ability to resolve problems is most important in the tour industry as shown in Table 30. 75 % of respondents combined to answer that having the ability to resolve problems was important in the setting of a TO industry as shown in Table 33.

7.10.6 The use of technology

The use of technology [question 4.6 of the manager questionnaire] was also used to measure service quality. It was operationalised using five-point likert scale ranging from 1 [Least important] to 5 [most important]. However, one scale was considered missing owing to no data entry. The valid responses were for 2, 3, 4 and most important. Respondents were required to indicate their level of use of technology as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 16.7 % of the respondents showed that use of technology was least important while 25.0% revealed that use of technology was most important. A combined number of respondents [58.3%] were affirmative that use of technology was important in the ITO industry as shown in Table 33.

7.10.7 Perceived level of time management

In this study time management [question 4.7 of the manager questionnaire] was measured using the five-point likert scale ranging from 1 [least important] to 5 [most important]. However, one scale was considered missing due to no data entry. The valid responses were for 2, 3, 4 and most important. Customer respondents were required to indicate their level for time management as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 8.3% of the respondents revealed that time management was least important while 33.3% revealed that time management was most important in the TO industry as shown below. A combined number of respondents [75.3 %] were affirmative that use of technology was important in the ITO industry as shown in Table 33.

7.10.8 Perceived level of price

In this study price [question 4.8 of the manager questionnaire] was measured using the five-point likert scale ranging from 1 [least important], to 5 [most important]. However, two scales were considered missing owing to no data entry. The valid responses were for least important, 3, 4 and most important. Customer respondents were required to indicate their level of price as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 18.2% of the respondents revealed that price was least important while 36.4 % revealed that price was most important in the TO industry as shown in Table 33.

7.10.9 Perceived influence of communication and information

In this study communication and information [question 4.9 of the manager questionnaire] were measured using the five-point likert scale ranging from 1 [Least important] to 5 [most important]. However, three scales were considered missing owing to wrong data entry. The valid responses were for least important and most important. Customer respondents were required to indicate their level of perceived communication and information as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 8.3% of the respondents revealed that communication and information was least important while 50.0 % revealed that communication and information was most important in the TO industry as shown in Table 33.

7.10.10 Perceived influence of hygiene and sanitation

In this study perceived influence of hygiene and sanitation [question 4.10 of the manager questionnaire] was measured using the five-point likert scale ranging from 1 [least important to 5 [most important]. However, one scale was considered missing owing to no data entry. The valid responses were for least important and most important. Manager respondents were required to indicate their level for hygiene and sanitation as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 8.3% of the respondents revealed that hygiene and sanitation were least important while 58.3% revealed that hygiene and sanitation were most important in the TO industry as shown in Table 33.

7.10.11 Perceived influence of logistics and amenities

In this study the level of perceived influence of logistics and amenities [question 4.11 of the manager questionnaire] was measured using the five-point likert scale ranging from 1 [least important] to 5 [most important]. However, two scales were considered missing owing to no data entry. The valid responses were for level 3, 4 and most important. Manager respondents were required to indicate their level for logistics and amenities as a predictor of service quality of selected TOs in Cameroon. The results revealed that 27.3% of the respondents revealed that logistics and amenities were most important in the TO industry as shown. It was observed that a combined percentage of 72.8 % of respondents indicated that logistics and amenities was important in the TO industry. Table 33 summarises the descriptive statistics of the manager respondents.

Table 33: Descriptive statistics of manager respondents

Perceived response rate of hospitality [7.10.1]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Least important	1	7,7	8,3	8,3
	3	1	7,7	8,3	16,7
	4	7	53,8	58,3	75,0
	Most important	3	23,1	25,0	100,0
	Total	12	92,3	100,0	
Missing	System	1	7,7		
Total		13	100,0		
Perceived level of Value for money [7.10.2]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Least important	1	7,7	8,3	8,3
	2	1	7,7	8,3	16,7
	3	3	23,1	25,0	41,7
	4	6	46,2	50,0	91,7
	Most important	1	7,7	8,3	100,0
	Total	12	92,3	100,0	
Missing	System	1	7,7		
Total		13	100,0		
Perceived level of safety and security [7.10.3]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Least important	2	15,4	18,2	18,2
	4	2	15,4	18,2	36,4
	Most important	7	53,8	63,6	100,0

	Total	11	84,6	100,0	
Missing	System	2	15,4		
Total		13	100,0		
Perceived level of tour quality [7.10.4]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	3	3	23,1	25,0	25,0
	4	4	30,8	33,3	58,3
	Most important	5	38,5	41,7	100,0
	Total	12	92,3	100,0	
Missing	System	1	7,7		
Total		13	100,0		
Ability to resolve problems [7.10.5]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	2	1	7,7	8,3	8,3
	3	2	15,4	16,7	25,0
	4	5	38,5	41,7	66,7
	Most important	4	30,8	33,3	100,0
	Total	12	92,3	100,0	
Missing	System	1	7,7		
Total		13	100,0		
Use of technology [7.10.6]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	2	2	15,4	16,7	16,7
	3	3	23,1	25,0	41,7
	4	4	30,8	33,3	75,0
	Most important	3	23,1	25,0	100,0
	Total	12	92,3	100,0	
Missing	System	1	7,7		
Total		13	100,0		
Perceived level of time management [7.10.7]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	2	1	7,7	8,3	8,3
	3	2	15,4	16,7	25,0

	4	5	38,5	41,7	66,7
	Most important	4	30,8	33,3	100,0
	Total	12	92,3	100,0	
Missing	System	1	7,7		
Total		13	100,0		
Perceived level of Price [7.10.8]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Least important	2	15,4	18,2	18,2
	3	2	15,4	18,2	36,4
	4	3	23,1	27,3	63,6
	Most important	4	30,8	36,4	100,0
	Total	11	84,6	100,0	
Missing	System	2	15,4		
Total		13	100,0		
Perceived influence of Communication and Information [7.10.9]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Least important	1	7,7	8,3	8,3
	2	1	7,7	8,3	16,7
	3	2	15,4	16,7	33,3
	4	2	15,4	16,7	50,0
	Most important	6	46,2	50,0	100,0
	Total	12	92,3	100,0	
Missing	System	1	7,7		
Total		13	100,0		
Perceived influence of hygiene and sanitation [7.10.10]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Least important	1	7,7	8,3	8,3
	4	4	30,8	33,3	41,7
	Most important	7	53,8	58,3	100,0

	Total	12	92,3	100,0	
Missing	System	1	7,7		
Total		13	100,0		
Perceived influence of logistics and amenities [7.10.11]		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	3	3	23,1	27,3	27,3
	4	5	38,5	45,5	72,7
	Most important	3	23,1	27,3	100,0
	Total	11	84,6	100,0	
Missing	System	2	15,4		
Total		13	100,0		

Source: Field Data

7.11 RESULTS OF DATA MANAGEMENT AND CLEANING PROCESS

This study was operationalised into five independent exogenous variables: empathy, assurance, responsiveness, reliability and tangibility while service quality evaluation was operationalised as endogenous dependent variable. As observed in the study, data management procedures for the test of validity and reliability measurements were conducted for the manager respondents.

7.11.1 Results of the test of validity and reliability measurement (VRM)

It was appropriate to ensure that the degree of validity and credibility of the research instruments are suitable to test the hypotheses. In line with scientific research, validity measures the degree to which constructs measure what they are supposed to measure (Weber, 2004; Sarantokos, 1997; Whichard, 2006). To this effect, construct validity was conducted to assess the degree to which the research constructs actually measured the theoretical constructs and explained results that are consistent with the literature (Sarantakos, 2005).

Similarly, reliability test was considered. The theoretical premise of reliability is anchored on the ability of consistency, stability and repeatability of data collection instrument to produce reliable and consistent results (Hair et al., 2010). This test was completed using the Cronbach alpha coefficient. The Cronbach alpha measures the level of consistency of the scale of measurement of research constructs (Field, 2009). Constructs with coefficients below the threshold of 0.70 as guided by Nunnally (1978) were dropped. However, it should be noted that the test of validity and reliability were based on only retained constructs observed in the study. Table 34 shows validity for all constructs involved in the proposed model.

Table 34: Test of Reliability Using Cronbach Alpha

Latent constructs	Cronbach Alpha	Cronbach Alpha based on standardised items	Sample size	No. of items	Status
Empathy	0.938	0.938	12	2	Reliable
Assurance	0.753	0.832	11	2	Reliable
Responsiveness	0.893	0.894	12	3	Reliable
Reliability	0.759	0.759	11	2	Reliable

Source: Field Data

In Table 34 the latent constructs of empathy, assurance, responsiveness and reliability were all reliable as their coefficients were above the threshold of 0.70. Meanwhile, the latent construct of tangibility proved to be unreliable as its coefficient was found below the threshold of 0.70 was dropped.

7.12 Inferential analysis using managers' questionnaire survey [Kendall rank correlation – non-parametric analysis]

In the analysis and test of hypotheses the Kendall rank correlation was applied. Maurice Kendall in 1938 initially introduced the Kendall rank correlation. In principle, it considered the particular order of the elements of the sets it was correlating. A Kendall rank correlation, τ, equal to 1 was interpreted as the elements in the two sets being ordered in the same way. $\tau = -1$ was interpreted as the elements in the two sets being ordered exactly oppositely. And $\tau = 0$ was interpreted as the ordering of the two sets having no relation to one another (Redman, 2019). The Kendall correlation was used in this study to confirm or reject the following hypothetical relationships:

H_1: Empathy has a positive and significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.

H_2: Assurance has a positive and significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.

H_3: Responsiveness has a positive and significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.

H_4: Reliability has a positive and significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.

H_5: Tangibility has a positive and significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.

Table 35: Kendall rank correlation

Correlations

			Empathy	Assurance	Responsiveness	Reliability	Tangibility	SQ_evaluation
Kendall's tau_b	Empathy	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	.611*	0,411	0,339	0,291	-0,122
		Sig. (2-tailed)		0,016	0,085	0,165	0,240	0,640
		N	12	12	12	12	12	12
	Assurance	Correlation Coefficient	.611*	1,000	.604*	.573*	.564*	-0,156
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0,016		0,014	0,024	0,028	0,562
		N	12	12	12	12	12	12
	Responsiveness	Correlation Coefficient	0,411	.604*	1,000	.684**	.662**	0,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0,085	0,014		0,004	0,006	1,000
		N	12	12	12	12	12	12
	Reliability	Correlation Coefficient	0,339	.573*	.684**	1,000	.582*	-0,122
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0,165	0,024	0,004		0,019	0,640
		N	12	12	12	12	12	12
	Tangibility	Correlation Coefficient	0,291	.564*	.662**	.582*	1,000	-0,075

		Sig. (2-tailed)	0,240	0,028	0,006	0,019		0,778
		N	12	12	12	12	12	12
	SQ_evaluation	Correlation Coefficient	-0,122	-0,156	0,000	-0,122	-0,075	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0,640	0,562	1,000	0,640	0,778	
		N	12	12	12	12	12	12
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).								
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).								

Source: Field Data

Presentation of results

Table 36: Presentation of results

Hypotheses	**P-Value at 95% (CI)**	**Conclusion**
H_1: Empathy has a positive significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.	[H_0: $\mu = .640 > 0.05$, $\beta = -0.122$, n=12].	Decline to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was insignificant statistical evidence to suggest that empathy had a positive significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.
H_2: Assurance has a positive significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.	[H_0: $\mu = 0.562 > 0.05$, $\beta = -0.156$, n = 12]	Decline to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was insignificant statistical evidence to suggest that assurance had a positive significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.
H_3: Service Responsiveness has a positive significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.	[H_0: $\mu = 1.000 > 0.05$, $\beta = 0.0$, n=12]	Decline to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was insignificant statistical evidence to suggest that responsiveness had a positive significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.
H_4: Reliability has a positive significant	[H_0: $\mu = 0.640 > 0.05$, β =	Decline to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was

relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.	-0.122, n=12]	insignificant statistical evidence to suggest that reliability had a positive significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.
H_5: Tangibility has a positive significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.	[H_0: $\mu = 0.778 > 0.05$, $\beta = -0.075$]	Decline to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was insignificant statistical evidence to suggest that tangibility had a positive significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.

Source: Field Data

Based on the correlation specifications of sample size n = 12, confidence interval at 95%, $\alpha = 0.05$, the analysis of data collected from managers showed insignificant statistical evidence to support the following relationships:

H_1: Empathy has a positive and significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.

H_2: Assurance has a positive and significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.

H_3: Responsiveness has a positive and significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.

H_4: Reliability has a positive and significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.

H_5: Tangibility has a positive and significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.

Considering the evidence of a small sample size n=12, it was therefore argued that the sample did not follow the parametric assumption of multivariate normality, and as such, it was thus considered that the analysis of correlation and regression using customers survey with sample size n =126> 50 was thus statistically reliable for the analysis.

7.13 MULTIVARIATE NORMALITY TEST

7.13.1 Measures of skewness and kurtosis

A distribution of data was considered to follow a normal distribution if the coeficient of both the skewness and kurtosis statistics were zero or approximate to zero (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). A common strategy to identify normality in the distribution was to conduct the test of skewness [symmetrical] and kurtosis [peakedness] for each measured variable (Field, 2005). As premised by Black et al. (1990), a suitable coeficient for kurtosis statistics should be between -5 - +5. The measurement of the test statistics for skewness was premised to be between -3 - +3. To this effect, the test for multivariate normality in this study was carried out using both visual and numerical techniques. The test for skewness (symmetry) and kurtosis (peakedness) were conducted (Field, 2009). The results from the other tests for normality were presented in the next table. Based on the outcome of the analysis of the aforementioned test, it was observed that all coeficients of the test statistics were appropriate for multivaraite normality [-3 and +3]

Table 37: Measures of skewness and kurtosis

Descriptive Statistics									
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Empathy	12	1.00	5.00	3.6667	1.05169	-1.584	.637	3.257	1.232
Assurance	12	2.00	5.00	4.1250	1.08972	-1.332	.637	.854	1.232
Responsive	12	2.00	5.00	3.8889	0.90267	-0.796	.637	-0.052	1.232
Reliability	12	1.50	5.00	3.7500	1.27029	-0.639	.637	-1.209	1.232
Tangibility	12	2.00	5.00	4.2083	0,83824	-1,771	.637	4.025	1.232
Service Qual. Eva.	12	3.00	6.00	5.5000	1.00000	-1.964	.637	3.018	1.232b
Valid N (listwise)	12								

Source: Field Data

The coefficient of skewness for empathy, assurance, responsiveness, reliability, tangibility and service quality evaluation were all within the range +/- 1 therefore, indicating normally distributed data sets. Equally, the kurtosis statistics for the latent construct: empathy, assurance, responsiveness, reliability, tangibility and service quality evaluation were within +/-2, therefore indicating a normal distribution.

7.14 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter on quantitative data analysis and results presented the techniques applied to examine the quantitative data collected from the customers [n=126] respondents and the managers [n=12] respondents on the field. The analysis comprised descriptive statistics and inferential analysis of both the customer and manager questionnaires sampled which were a total of 138 analysed from the questionnaires administered online via survey monkey. Descriptive statistics included analysing the biographic information of both customers and managers respondents examined based on the parameters of gender, age and years of experience in the TO industry as presented in section A7.2 and B7.2 respectively. The observed independent latent constructs of this study were empathy, assurance, responsiveness, reliability and tangibility while service quality evaluation was considered as the dependent variable. These constructs were using the following different indicators: empathy [hospitality; value for money], assurance [safety and security; tour quality], responsiveness [ability to resolve problems; use of technology; time management], reliability [price; communication and information] and tangibility [hygiene and sanitation; logistics and amenities] were all presented in section A7.3. The data management process started with the treatment of missing data, followed by dimension reduction analysis and lastly, the test of parametric assumptions with specific interest on the treatment of outliers, multivariate normality, multicollinearity and homogeneity of variance was presented in section 7.4 for the customer respondents. The test of validity and reliability measurement was carried out using Cronbach alpha which in this study was confirmed to be reliable (values above 0.7) for all the latent constructs. The inferential statistical analysis for customer respondents was used to test the research hypotheses using the Pearson moment correlation whose results rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that there exists a significant relationship between the independent and dependent latent constructs. Also, multiple regression analyses were run to determine the causal relationships between the variables of the study in line with the hypotheses of the study in the customer respondents. Section B of this chapter dwelled on presenting the statistical analysis of the manager respondents. The descriptive statistics focused on analysing the biographic information of manager respondents (gender, age and years of experience in the TO industry). Inferential statistical analysis of manager respondents was based on the non-parametric assumption technique called the Kendall correlation. In section B7.5, the Kendall correlation was presented whose results declined to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was insignificant statistical evidence to suggest that the independent constructs [empathy, assurance, responsiveness, reliability and tangibility] have a positive significant relationship with the dependent latent construct [Service Quality Evaluation]. Equally, the multivariate normality test (measures of skewness and kurtosis) was conducted for manager respondents whose results indicate that the coefficient of skewness for the latent constructs were all within the range +/- 1 therefore indicating normally distributed data sets. Finally, the kurtosis statistics for the latent construct fell within the range +/-2, therefore indicating a normal distribution.

The next chapter (chapter 8) presented and examined the qualitative data analysis and its results.

CHAPTER EIGHT

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH RESULTS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presented and discussed the in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with seven tourism professionals versed with the Cameroon ITO sector conducted in February 2021. These experts were either founders / owners or at the head of the TO company operating an office either in Yaoundé or Douala, the two major cities in Cameroon. The objectives of this interviews were to get more comprehensive answers that will validate the results already obtained during the quantitative survey phase of this study as presented and discussed in Chapter 7. A description of the interview guide was discussed in Chapter 6, section 6.2.

The analysis in this chapter comprised descriptive statistics of the interview response rate for seven respondents as discussed in section 8. Inferential analysis applied included grounded theory analysis presented in section 8.3 to generate themes emerging from the qualitative data set, approved upon attainment of theoretical saturations via a series of continuous compounding analysis of opinions. This chapter helped to achieve the following secondary objectives:

I. To underscore the ITO industry experts' opinions of a working definition of service quality;
II. To explore the major determinants of service quality as perceived by experts in the ITO industry;
III. To identify the dynamics between service quality expectation and service quality perception as viewed by Cameroon TO industry experts; and
IV. To identify areas of quality management aimed at improving service quality in the ITO industry.

This study aimed at modelling an effective service quality evaluation framework for the ITO industry in Cameroon called the service quality path model which was presented in section 8.4.

The first section of this chapter presented the results of the descriptive statistics [interview response rate and demographic information of respondents] followed by results presentation of the grounded theory analysis. Thereafter, the suggested service quality evaluation model was presented. This chapter ended with a summary of the findings.

8.2 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

8.2.1 Results of interview response rate

A total of eight questions including three demographic questions on [age; gender and experience] then five core research questions were completed during the interview and a total of seven industry experts completed the interview session out of the ten experts earmarked in the beginning because we had arrived at a stage of saturation (repetition) where no new themes or codes emerged. The distribution of complete responses for the study are as shown next

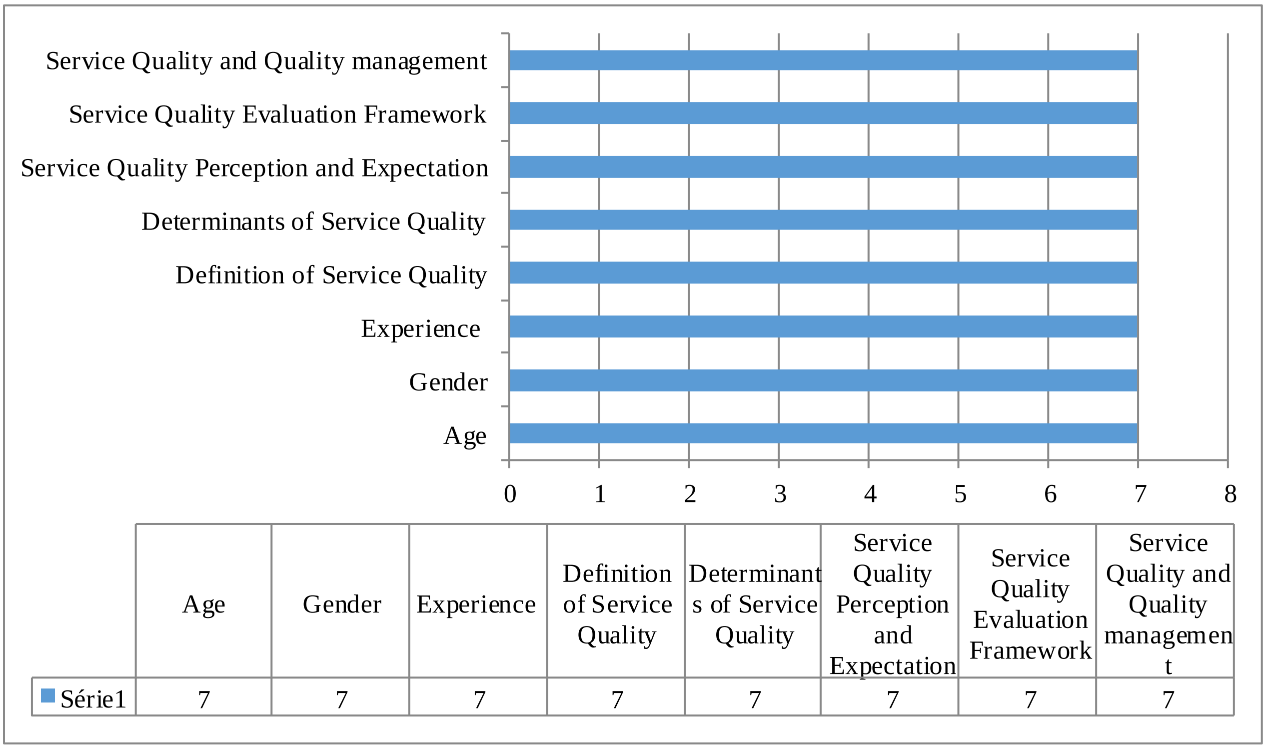


Figure 36: Distribution of demographic characteristics of the sample

Source: Field Data

To ensure appropriateness of the sample frame, the interview guide was completed using key demographic characteristics as previously explained in the methodology. Three demographic considerations were identified. Gender was measured using binary categorical data while age and experience were measured using continuous data structured in ranges. These were further explained next.

8.2.2 Results of demographic information of interviewees

8.2.2.1 Gender of respondents

As observed in the study, gender was both female and male considerations and measured using binary categorical data. The gender representation consisted of four males and three females representing a sample size of seven interviewees. There were no cases of missing data. Based on the gender distribution, there were more males than females. However, the issue of gender discrimination was not observed as the sample frame constituted an appropriate representation of the target population. The inclusion of gender considerations goes a long-way to enhance the validity and reliability of the study. In this light, it was evident to suggest that the sample was appropriate for the analysis and as such the analysis was not gender bias.

8.2.2.2 Age of respondents

The distribution of respondents by age was a vital demographic characteristic to ensure valid and appropriate responses. In this study, age was measured using non-categorical data ranging from [18-28], [29-40], [41-51] and [52-62]. Majority of the participants were between the age ranges of [41-51 years]. The age range represented a population of young and older adults. This brought to light an innovative and dynamic sample with experiences and ideas across different age groups. Considering the age diversity, it was established that responses observed in the interview were sourced from well informed sample of people with stronger generational implications regarding the phenomenon of service quality in the TO industry. It should be noted that changes in taste and fashion were reflected by differences in generational perspectives. To this effect, the sample was therefore considered appropriate for the study. The distribution was as shown in the next section.

8.2.2.3 Industry or service experience of respondents

Industry or service experience related to the number of active years of function in an industry. For respondents to be considered appropriate and relevant for the study, they must have some level of industrial experience. This therefore provided adequate evidence of the quality of data collected from this sample frame. In this study, service experience was measured based on three categories ranging from [2-12], [13-23] and [24-34]. Majority of the respondents had service experience between [13-23] years. The years of service experience of this study was appropriate as the participants had largely surpassed the required experience of above >5 years to provide credible and appropriate responses regarding service quality in the TO industry. The next figure summarised these analyses.

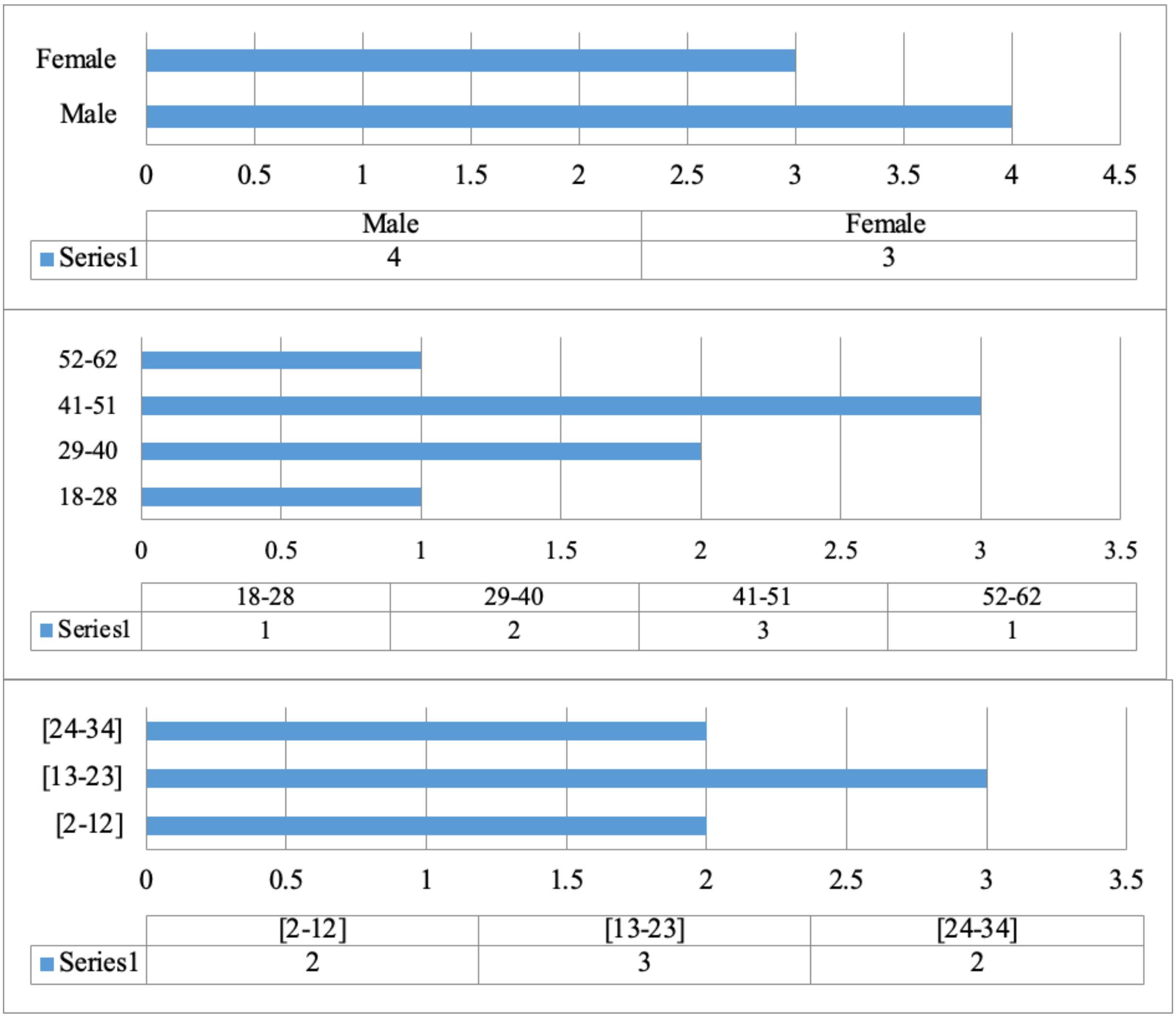


Figure 37: Results of demographic data [age, gender and service experience] of interviewees.
Source: Field data

8.3 RESULTS OF THE GROUNDED THEORY ANALYSIS OF THE QUALITATIVE DATA

The grounded theory was anchored on three pillars; open coding process, axial coding process and selective coding process. The primary objective of the grounded theory analysis was to generate themes emerging from qualitative data, which were approved upon the attainment of theoretical saturations via a series of continuous compounding analysis of opinions which were grounded in the data.

The results of the analysis of the qualitative data were presented next as per the respective core research questions presented in chapter 1.3.2 which were as follows:

IV. What are the perspectives of ITO industry expert opinions of a working definition of service quality?

V. What are the major determinants of service quality as perceived by experts in the case of Cameroon TO industry?

VI. What are the dynamics between service quality expectation and service quality perception as viewed by TO experts?

8.3.1 Exploring stakeholders' perceptions of the definition of service quality

The first objective of the in-depth interview was geared towards exploring the perception of the definition of service quality based on the views of experts in the TO industry. It was important to understand the fundamental implication of what constituted a working definition of the concept of service quality for these TOs. This was achieved by the following analysis as shown in the next paragraphs.

Two key ideas regarding the definition of service quality were identified. Basically, the opinions of the TO industry experts were categorised into two portfolios regarding a working definition of the concept of service quality. These categories were customer-centric and service-centric operations and objectives. However, based on the open coding process, key attention was to identify emerging ideas at the point of theoretical saturation, which was relevant to approve that the sample size was appropriate for the study.

From the next table, the first respondents introduced opinion grouped as customer-centric perspective. The second experts repeated the same opinion but added a new view grouped as service-centric perspective. However, a new concept was introduced which was not previously mentioned by the first participants. This emerging idea implied that saturation had not been achieved at this point. The third to the seventh participants did not introduce any further new idea contrary to previous experts. In this regard, the study concluded that the sample size for the first objective was appropriate considering that saturation was achieved and that even if the number of participants was to be increased, there will be no significant new idea to change what already existed. In effect, saturation was achieved at the point of the third participant but the number of interviewees was extended up to the seventh participants just for validity and reliability purposes.

The next phase of the grounded theory analysis was to establish the relationships between codes observed in the opening coding process. It was important to underscore that codes of similar patterns must be regrouped to constitute a category. Axial coding made this possible in the regrouping process as shown in Table 38:

Memo:
Two categories were identified to explain a working definition of service quality in the TO industry as explained next:

I. **Customer-centric [CS]:** What is an appropriate definition for service quality to suit the TO industry in Cameroon as perceived by industry experts? It was identified that service quality was a function of customer-centric activities and service-centric preoccupations. In this study, it was observed that customer-centric activities relate to strategies used by the TO to make their customers happy to have consumed their services. Whatever strategies used by TOs to get customers satisfied was considered customer-centric objectives. Meeting customer's expectation and attracting new clients was a priority in the survival of tour operations. In essence, its customer-centric activities also embodied providing what TOs perceived to ensure that customer’s perception meets their expectation of service quality. SQ was the way customers perceived services that were being rendered to them to be able to say whether they are good or bad.

II. **Service-centric [SC]:** All activities focused on making sure that services were attractive, profitable and meeting corporate objectives and missions. These were considered as service-centric. The premise of service-centric operations often related to management preoccupations. According to the study, these activities included themes such as lean management aimed at minimising waste of resources. Under service-centric perspective, quality was achieved to meet stated objectives of the organisation. Furthermore, service-centric mind-sets related to making evaluation between planned and actual performance result in respect to service quality measurement. In addition, it was observed that SQ was based on providing acceptable services that match with established price structures. The service was up to date and reflected the price and delivered in a professional manner.

8.3.2 Selective coding process

The last phase of the grounded theory analysis was the selective coding process. Here attention was focused on identifying the theme that emerged from the data. It was on this basis that conclusions were made regarding the phenomenon under study. These patterns were shown on the Table 38.

Table 38: Open Codes - working definition of the concept of service quality

a. Open coding process - working definition of the concept of service quality			
Respondents	Categories	Narratives / Discussion / Codes	Saturation
I	Customer-centric	[…]SQ is the way a tourism agent making a customer to feel happy to have consumed his services. Everything you can do to satisfy a client	-
II	Customer-centric	[…]SQ for me primarily would have to do with how best we satisfy a customer's expectation. so much about	-
	Service-centric	[…]lean management, how much we minimise waste of time, a waste of resources	EC
III	Customer-centric	[…]SQ is how well clients are served with what was proposed. Their perceptions towards what was to be proposed to them. How do I perceive your offer, did you meet what you told me you were going to deliver.	-
IV	Service-centric	[…]SQ involves the way we offer services in relation to a particular service need. We talk of quality when we seek to attain a particular	-

		result	
V	Customer-centric	[…]SQ is the way customer perceive services that are being rendered to them to be able to say whether they are good or they are bad.	-
VI	Service-centric	[…]SQ is the evaluation between what one has in mind to do their perspective and the performance to really realize what you want to do.	-
VII	Service-centric	[…]SQ is providing acceptable services that match with the price. The service should be up to date and should reflect the price and delivered in a professional manner.	-

a. Axial coding

Categories	Narratives
Customer-centric	[…]SQ is the way a tourism agent makes a customer to feel happy to have consumed his services. Everything you can do to satisfy […]SQ for me primarily would have to do with how best we satisfy a customer's expectation. so much about […]SQ is how well clients are served with what was proposed. Their perceptions towards what was to be proposed to them. How do I perceive your offer, did you meet what you told me you were going to deliver. […]SQ is the way customer perceive services that are being rendered to them to be able to say whether they are good or they are bad.
Service-centric	[…]lean management, how much we minimise waste of time, a waste of resources […]SQ involves the way we offer services in relation to a particular service need. We talk of quality when we seek to attain a particular result […]SQ is the evaluation between what one has in mind to do their perspective and the performance to really realize what you want to do. […]SQ is providing acceptable services that match with the price. The service should be up to date and should reflect the price and delivered in a

	professional manner.
b. **Selective coding process**	

Categories	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	RANK
Customer-centric	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	4
Service-centric	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	4

Source: Field Data

Based on the aforementioned table, the two concepts of service-centricity and customer-centricity were observed as themes for an appropriate working definition of service quality to suit the context of the TO industry. It was acknowledged that TOs must consider focusing attention to improve service offerings with the intention of meeting the needs of their clients. Customer perception and expectation must be carefully managed in light with service-centric activities. In as much as TOs were focused on service-centric operations, there was a need to achieve customers' objectives simultaneously. Customer-centric activities were therefore set to meet customer satisfaction as shown in the next model.

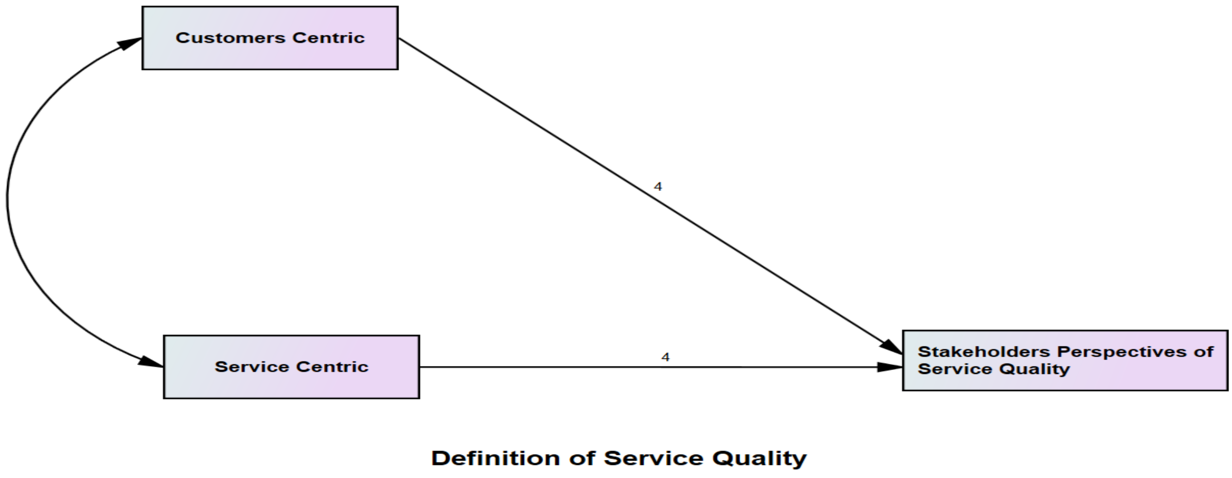


Figure 38: Service quality Definition

Source: Field Data

8.3.2.1 Exploring determinants of service quality

To ensure appropriate and effective application of procedures to enhance service quality in the TO industry, it was important to understand the determinants that drive service quality to acceptable levels that meet the needs of the clients. Based on expert opinions, the following were emerging ideas considered appropriate for service quality enhancement in the TO industry as shown in Table 39.

Based on the aforementioned open coding process, the first respondents identified opinions related to safety and security and hospitality. Hospitality was repeated by the second and third experts. The fourth interviewee introduced a new concept of communication while the fifth expert identified price, which was both not mentioned by the first and third respondents. These were considered as emerging codes. However, the sixth and seventh experts repeated opinions relating to hospitality, communication and safety and security. This finally confirmed the attainment of theoretical saturation for the question on determinants of service quality. In this way, it was considered that the sample for the study was appropriate as there was no further evidence of significant newness in the opinions of additional experts for the study.

a. Axial coding – determinants of service quality

Codes of similar pattern were regrouped to constitute categories as shown on the axial coding in Table 39:

Memo:
What are the major determinants of service quality? To ensure appropriate policy framework to enforce service quality, industry experts proposed four main themes of considerations explained below:

I. **Safety and security:** Safety and security was a key determinant of service quality in the TO industry. Every TO must assess the level of safety and available security measures put in place to ensure that tourists enjoy their tour / visit. When designing a tour service package, this element must be of high consideration. Regarding this study, the experts hold that hygiene and sanitation must also be considered in tour service quality package to ensure health safety and security of its clients.

II. **Hospitality:** The way you receive a tourist is very important as it creates the first impression in their minds. Hospitality remains a key determinant in designing service quality package. The study reveals that effectively the first contact always creates the first impression about service offerings. Designing appropriate strategy for hospitality can create long lasting impression and repeated purchase of tour services.

III. **Communication:** To follow-up with the service quality packages, communication becomes very important. Information symmetry must be well guided to ensure that all relevant information regarding service quality should be well communicated to clients. This will enable them to make the right choices regarding service offerings. To this effect, the right information must be provided at all times for the customers to be knowledgeable. Equally, the collection of customer feedback and appraisal form will enable the TOs to assess the level of customers' satisfactions and identify appropriate strategies to enhance the service quality package.

IV. **Price:** Price was the most influential factor. It provided the basis to assess affordability and service quality. The price must be able to keep clients happy and willing to pay. It was important to match price and quality. High quality service with affordable price will attract more clients.

b. Selective coding process

Based on the aforementioned axial coding process, hospitality was considered as the main determinant followed by safety and security and communication as shown on the next selective coding table.

Table 39: Open coding- exploring key determinants to enhance service quality

Open coding process – exploring key determinants to enhance service quality			
Respondents	Categories	Narratives / Discussions / Codes	Saturation
I	Safety and Security	[…] Safety and security because in tourism activity people wish to be happy and safe	-
	Hospitality	[…] Hospitality	-
II	Hospitality	[…] Hospitality ranks first for me. The way you receive a tourist is very important	-
III	Safety and Security	[…] Safety and security because no one wants to do tourism in an unsafe environment	-
IV	Hospitality	[…] Hospitality remains determinant and eminent as the first contact always creates the first impression.	-
	Communication	[…] Communication is important. The right information must be provided for the customers to be knowledgeable	**EC**
V	Price	[…]Price is the most influential factor because if the price you pay for a package is good enough to cater for those who would be rendering to you the service, that is already 80% assurance that you would get good services.	**EC**
VI	Hospitality	[…] Hospitality management. It has 3 phases. The first is the preparation phase to receive the tourists.	-
	Communication	[…] Customer feedback appraisal from your customers.	-
VII	Safety and Security	[…] Followed by hygiene and sanitation that is also very important.	-
	Communication	[…]Information and communication	-

Axial coding process	
Categories	Narratives / Discussion / Codes
Safety and Security	[…]Safety and security because in tourism clients need to be happy and feel safe and secure […] Hygiene and sanitation are equally important.
Hospitality	[…]Hospitality ranks first. The way you receive a tourist is very important […]Hospitality remains eminent as the first contact always creates the first impression.
Communication	[…] Communication is important. The right information must be provided for the customer to be knowledgeable […] Customer feedback appraisal.

	[…]Information and communication are key.
Price	[…]Price is the most influential factor because if the price you pay for a package is good enough to cater for those who would be rendering to you the service, that is already 80% assurance that you would get good services.

Selective coding								
Categories	R1	R 2	R 3	R 4	R 5	R 6	R 7	RANK
Safety and security	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	3
Hospitality	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	4
Communication	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	3
Price	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1

Source: Field Data

It was important to note that these factors were not considered in isolation, the integration of communication, hospitality and safety and security provided a stronger perspective to the design of service quality framework as shown on the next structural model.

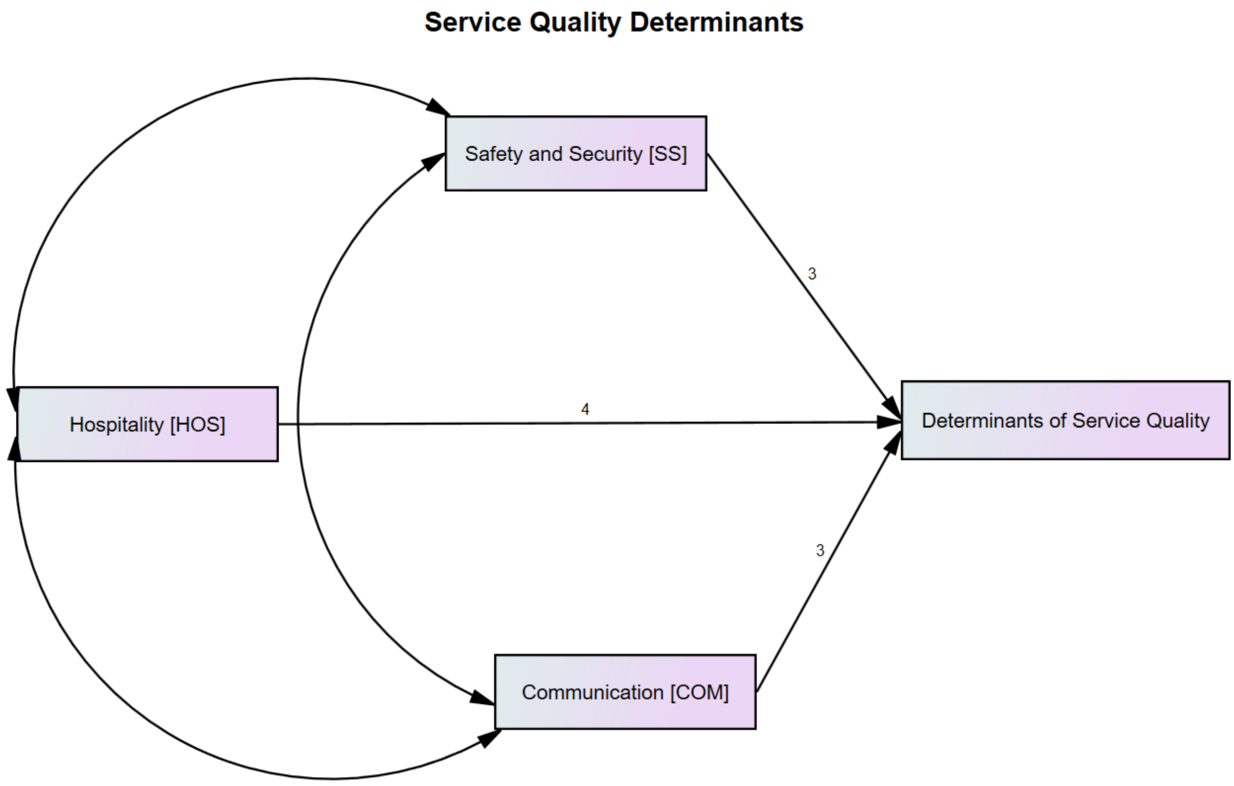


Figure 39: Service Quality Determinants

Source: Field Data

8.3.2.2 Service perception and service expectation dynamics

The gap between service quality perception and service quality expectation created the possibility of clients' state of dissatisfaction. It was important for ITOs in Cameroon to understand the views of customers regarding marketing offerings. These views were shown in the open coding process.

Four key concepts emerged in the open coding process. However, the first respondents revealed market intelligence as key in understanding clients' perceptions and expectation dynamics. The second expert revealed two concepts regarding perceptions and expectations. Market intelligence and growth in market share were identified. Growth in market share emerged as a new code. The third expert identified market intelligence whereas the fourth and fifth experts brought in objectivity and communication as emerging codes. However, the sixth and seventh interviews did not add anything new. At this point, it was concluded that theoretical saturation was achieved at the sixth interviewee.

b. Axial coding process

The aforementioned open codes were regrouped into four categories as shown on the next axial coding table.

Memo:
What are the dynamics between service quality expectation and service quality perception as viewed by TO experts? Based on expert opinions, five indicators emerged and are presented next.

I. **Market intelligence and research:** To match perception with expectation, it was important to conduct market research to obtain market intelligence. Based on the study, experts' opinions regarding service perception and expectation related to the ability to know the clients' service expectations before offering a service. The client's expectation was very important especially nowadays as majority of clients had variety of expectations. The way a service was packaged will determine the way the customer saw the product. There is a whole theory about customer expectation and service delivery. Before offering a service, the TO should conduct a comparative study of service offering for both developed and developing countries. Service perception provided the baseline to know what you are giving to the customers and what they wanted. It was important to note that to evaluate the customers' expectations, you must understand their perceptions and make sure it matches to what they expect.

II. **Growth in market share:** Experts' opinions equally hold that the best service quality was that which brings additional referrals to the business. Such services are geared towards satisfying the service expectation of the customers.

III. **Objectivity:** The implications of service perception and expectation dynamics relate to the assessment of the objectives to be attained by comparing service quality perception and service quality expectation based on customers views. Service quality expectation must reflect the corporate image of a TO company.

IV. **Communication:** Apart from inadequate market research and intelligence leading to mismatch between service quality perception and service quality expectation, there was poor communication and lack of information. Experts' opinions revealed that the greatest factor that causes variations in clients service expectation and service delivery relate to issues of ineffective communication. Communication must be professionally managed to ensure that all stakeholders are well informed of relevant information in the industry.

C. Selective Coding Process

The selective coding process for the aforementioned axial coding is shown next. Based on the selective coding process, the theme regarding the dynamics between service quality perception and service quality expectation is best explained by conducting regular market research to have the capacity of market intelligence to understand market behaviour and trend. Objectivity of service quality package can also provide the basis to match perception and expectation.

Table 40: Open coding process - service quality perceptions versus service expectation dynamics

Opening coding process – service quality perceptions versus service expectation dynamics			
Respondents	Categories	Narratives /Discussion/ Codes	Saturation
I	Market intelligence	[…] The agent must know the service expectations before offering a service.	-
II	Market intelligence	[…] The client's expectation is always important to understand clients especially nowadays. Clients have all the crazy expectations of what a top-notch service is supposed to be.	-
	Growth in market share	[…] The best service quality is that which brings referrals to the business and geared towards meeting the service expectation of the clients.	**EC**
III	Marketing intelligence	[…] To me it's about trying your very best to meet clients' expectation. If the money I am paying for a particular service can satisfy me, then I would consider the service quality being good.	-
IV	Objectivity	[…] I believe is in relation to the objectives to be attained that a TO was evaluated considering what was expected to be done and what was actually done.	**EC**
V	Communication	[…] Poor communication is the greatest factor that causes variations in customer service expectation and delivery.	**EC**
	Market intelligence	[…] There is a whole theory about customer expectation and service delivery. Before offering a service, the TO should conduct a comparative study of services in the developed worlds and the developing world so that appropriate services are provided accordingly	-
VI	Objectivity	[…] with perception, there is already an idea in mind regarding what to offer. To evaluate the customers, you have to compare what you have in mind (perception) to what was done on the ground (expectation)	-
VII	Objectivity	[…] There is a concept called corporate image in tourism. Usually what you see in the field and what happens in the field matters.	-

	Marketing intelligence	[…] The way a product / service is packaged will determine the way a customer will see the product	-
	communication	[…] Communication is important.	-

	Axial coding
Categories	**Narratives / Discussion / Codes**
Market intelligence and research	[…] The agent must know the service expectations before offering a service. […] The client's expectation is always important to understand especially nowadays. Customers now have very crazy expectations. Service perception would often come from the TOs' angle. […] The way a product / service is packaged will determine the way a customer will see the product […] If I'm satisfied for the services I paid for, then I shall rate the service as being good […] There is a whole theory about customer expectation and service delivery. Before offering a service, the TO should conduct a comparative study of services in the developed worlds compared to the developing world so that the appropriate services as per the customer is provided accordingly […] With perception there is already an idea in mind so you what you are giving to the customer. To know how to evaluate the customer you have to compare what you have in mind (perception) matches to what was done on the ground (expectation) to best tell.
Growth in market share	[…] The best service quality is the kind of service that will bring referrals and repeat business is that which is geared towards satisfying the service expectation from the clients.
Objectivity	[…] It should relate to the objectives to be attained that a TO was evaluated considering what was expected to be done and what effectively was done. […] There is a concept called corporate image in tourism. Usually what you see out of the field and what happens in the field matters.
Communication	[…] Poor communication i would say is the greatest factor that causes variations in customer service expectation and delivery.

Selective coding

Categories	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	Rank
Market intelligence and research	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	4
Growth in market share	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Objectivity	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	3
Communication	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2

Source: Field Data

Once management can define guidelines of expected service quality threshold, then the delivery will be guided to meet such standard. These emerging patterns are shown next.

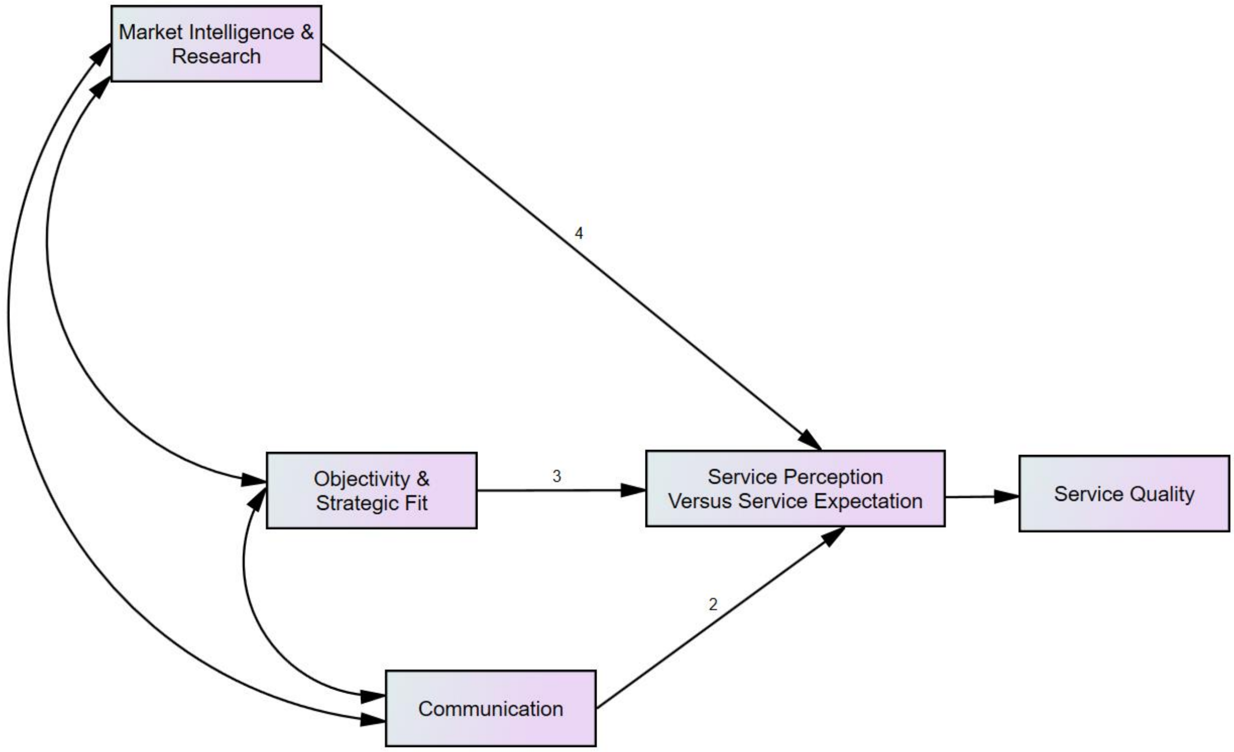


Figure 40: Service quality perceptions and expectations dynamics
Source: Field Data

8.3.2.3 Service Quality evaluation framework for the ITO industry

Service quality evaluation framework provides a series of factors to ensure that the service quality perception matches with service quality expectation within the ITO industry in Cameroon. For this to happen, the industry experts consider the following propositions to be considered when developing an evaluation framework for service quality as shown on the next open coding table.

a. Open coding process

Table 41: Categories of Service quality evaluation framework.

Respondents	Categories	Narratives / Discussion / Codes
I	Ethics and Guidelines	[…] There is an ethics guide for tourists which if followed; there are high chances of success.
II	Feedback and Review	[…] The first thing is taking the client feedback. I mean, they should treat every feedback today. We have a lot of reviews online to know what the client's saying. Get into every review, every feedback and improve on the service
	Technology	[…] Because we've discovered that most TOs in Africa are still using the old ways; so, it's important that they upgrade in terms

		of technology
III	Customers Focused	[…] The framework is all about a set of rules set that focuses on the clients.
IV	Customer Focused	[…] The framework serves as indicators that tell us if what we are doing well or not. These are elements that help one analysis if effectively the services rendered to the customer are satisfied.
V	Benchmark Analysis	[…]To analyse a quality assessment framework certain factors pertaining to SQ must be considered and you have to measure these factors to the real situation based on benchmark analysis.
	Customer Focused	[…] You have to understand that the expectations vary from different clients
VI	Guidelines	[…]You have to give something that best resembles a TO service
VII	Market Competitiveness	[…]One of the objectives of a framework is to keep a TO lofty and in the market and to measure strength with competitors.
	Technology	[…]One of the things that will keep a TO up to date is technology and those lacking in technology will eventually disappear.
	Logistic	[…]Logistics involves displacement which has to do with movement and transportation. The TO has to make sure the logistics are up to standard
	Hygiene and Sanitation	[…] Hygiene and sanitation are also very important. Catering services must be safe for the customer. All these things must be put under the framework of quality service.

Source: Field Data

Ethics and guidelines, customers' feedback and review, technology, customers' focused guidelines, benchmark analysis, market competitiveness, logistic and hygiene and sanitation must be put together in developing an effective service quality framework. The understanding of experts' opinions could be enhanced by integrating all these components together in modelling an effective service quality manual. Developing well established ethical guidelines is strategic. Collective customers' feedback and making reviews with the intention to enhance service quality operations is vital. Technology is also essential as it brings into play the element of innovation and enhancing customers' tastes.

A good framework must cater for logistics and sanitation. In addition, the service quality framework must have competitive advantage to the ITO. The last very important point was the integration of benchmarking analysis to evaluate the extent to which the service quality manual was effective and efficient. If the service quality toolkits cannot meet both the customers' expectation and the objective of the ITO, then there was need for review and therefore change became imminent in such systems. For implementation, the service quality framework must be integrated as shown in the next structural model.

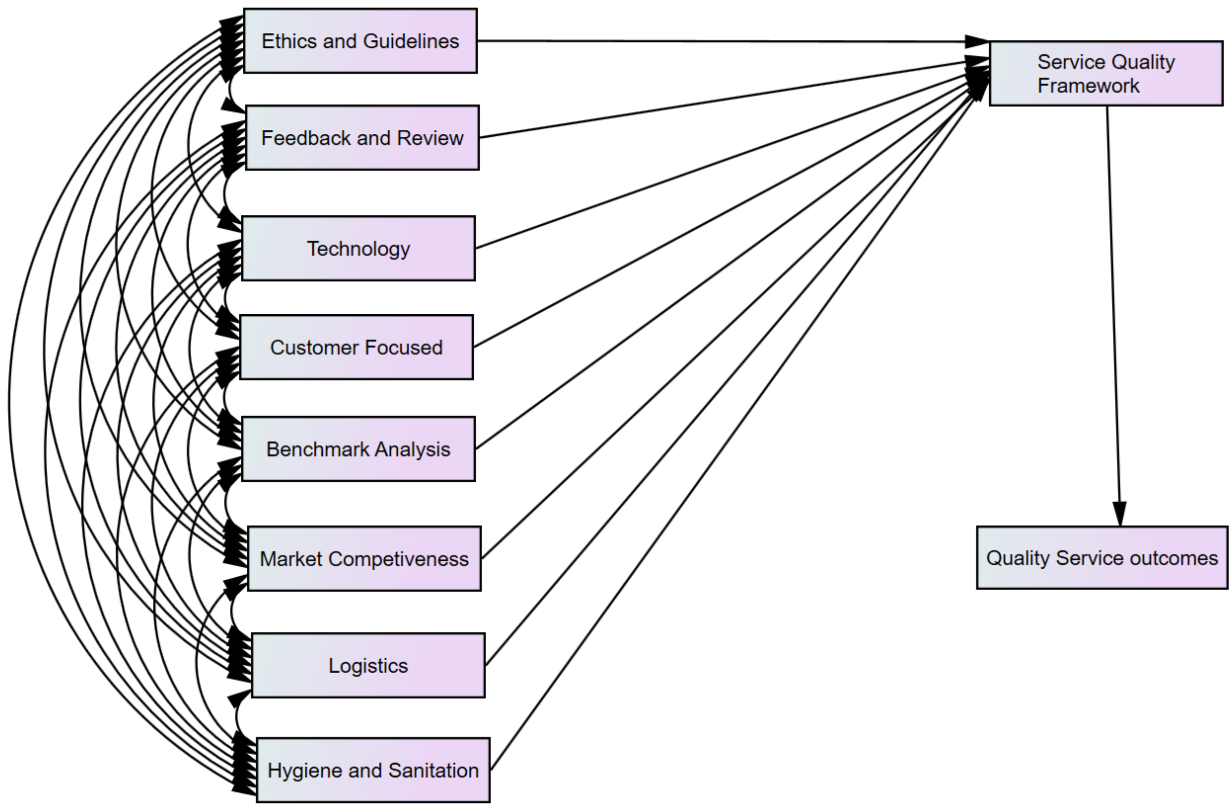


Figure 41: Service quality framework integration

Source: Field Data

As shown above in the service quality framework, it was observed that the integration of ethics and guidelines, customers' feedback and review, technology, customers focused guidelines, benchmark analysis, market competitiveness, logistics and hygiene and sanitation must deliver quality service outcomes. The service quality framework was evaluated based on the state of service quality outcomes as shown next.

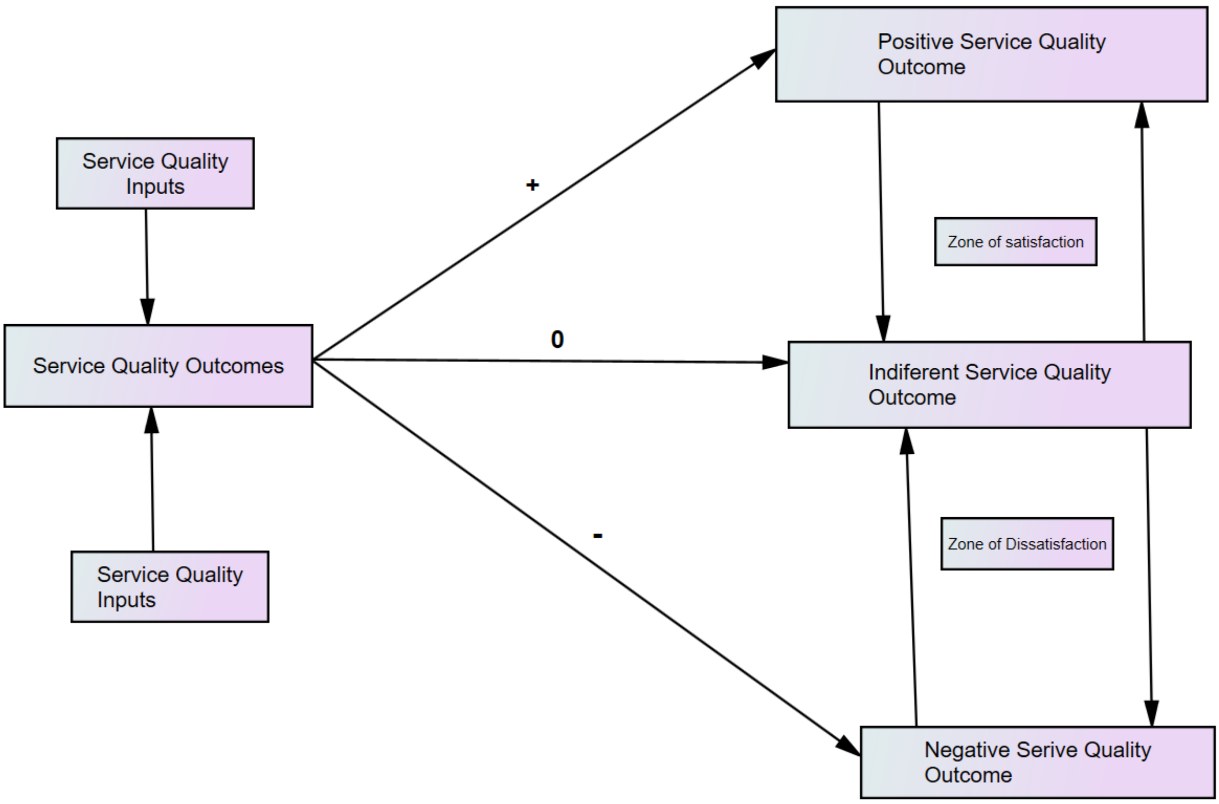


Figure 42:Service quality outcomes
Source: Field Data

In this model of service quality framework based on TO expert's opinions, it was observed that service quality determinants, drivers and components influence the kind of service quality activities to be implemented. However, the extent of these factors cumulates to determine the likelihood that service quality perception meets service quality expectations. To this effect, the study identified three levels of outcomes including positive service quality outcome, indifferent service quality outcome and negative service quality outcome. The analysis of the state of the outcomes was based on benchmarking by comparing planned service quality expectations to the actual service quality outcomes.

If the outcome was higher than planned, such results were considered positive. In principle, it was established that positive service quality outcome generated the zone of comfort and satisfaction of service offering. This zone brought growth, profits and more referrals. The second scenario was considered negative service quality outcomes when planned service quality expectation was below actual service quality outcomes. This situation generated the zone of customers' dissatisfactions, which was translated into poor quality service, loss of profit, drop in market share, loss of customers and goodwill of the business. Negative service quality outcome must be avoided by the TOs at all costs. It caused great mismatch between service quality perception and service quality expectations.

The third scenario was considered indifferent service quality outcome. This occurred when the generated service quality produced no significant change in customer satisfaction. The hypothetical premise suggested that changes in service quality must result to changes in customer satisfaction zone. It was very important for ITOs to make only changes that resulted to creating a zone of satisfaction. Otherwise, this outcome shall result in costly blunders and waste of resources.

8.3.3 Enhancing quality management and service quality

Table 42: Enhancing quality management and service quality

Open coding process		
Respondents	Categories	Narratives / Discussion / Codes
I	Ethics and guidelines	[…] There is an ethics guide for tourists which if followed; there are high chances of success.
II	Feedback and review	[…] The first thing is taking the client feedback. I mean, they should treat every feedback today. We have a lot of reviews online to know what the client's saying. Get into every review, every feedback and improve on the service
	Technology	[…] Because we've discovered that most TOs in Africa are still using the old ways; so, it's important that they upgrade in terms of technology
III	Customers focused	[…] The framework is all about a set of rules set that focuses on the clients.
IV	Customer focused	[…] The framework serves as indicators that tell us if what we are doing well or not. These are elements that help one analysis if effectively the services rendered to the customer are satisfied.
V	Benchmark analysis	[…]To analyse a quality assessment framework certain factors pertaining to SQ must be considered and you must measure these factors to the real situation based on benchmark analysis.
	Customer focused	[…] You have understood that the expectations vary from different clients
VI	Guidelines	[…]You must give something that best resembles a TO service

VII	Market competitiveness	[…]One of the objectives of a framework is to keep a TO lofty and in the market and to measure strength with competitors.
	Technology	[…]One of the things that will keep a TO up to date is technology and those lacking in technology will eventually disappear.
	Logistic	[…]Logistics involves displacement which has to do with movement and transportation. The TO has to make sure the logistics are up to standard
	Hygiene and sanitation	[…] Hygiene and sanitation are also very important. Catering services must be safe for the customer. All these things must be put under the framework of quality service.

Axial coding

Cate	Narratives / Discussion / Codes
Employee development	[…] I think employee development and HR very important […] I will emphasize on employee development because it makes works to feel belonging to the company they will give their best in delivering services. A happy employee brings happy clients
Leadership	[…] leadership comes first because everything rises and falls on leadership. So is quality management. Yes. TOs should seize from just being managers to leaders.
Crisis management	[…] The Covid-19 pandemic is real and So I think crisis management is important at this point. It is important for TOs to develop strategy to thrive in a post COVID era. […] With the COVID-19 pandemic, TO must develop internal tourism as there are fewer international travels. That is why the association of tour guides of Cameroon, has embarked on the sensitization of the population on the importance of local tourism
ICT	Tour operators must integrate ICTs in their operations
Research	[…] Conducting market research is vital to keep ahead of competitors. Trends are changing in the TO industry especially with the COVID-19 pandemic. There are now smaller group travels compared to larger groups in the past.
ISO	[…] It is very good for TOs to take into consideration the ISO standardization. In Cameroon there is ANOR that takes care of standardization. It is important to offer services of international standards so as to have a high SQ rating.

Selective coding

Category	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	RANK
Research	0	1	1	1	0	3

Employee development	1	1	0	0	0	2
Leadership	1	0	0	0	0	1
Crisis management	1	0	0	0	1	2
ICT	1	0	0	0	0	1
ISO	0	0	0	1	0	1

Source: Field data

Six categories were identified as components to enhance quality management for the ITO industry in Cameroon. However, expert opinions were typical of research, employees' development and crisis management as strategic guidelines to boost service quality via quality management system. The integration of these entire components will go a long way to enhance the performance of TO and service quality as shown next.

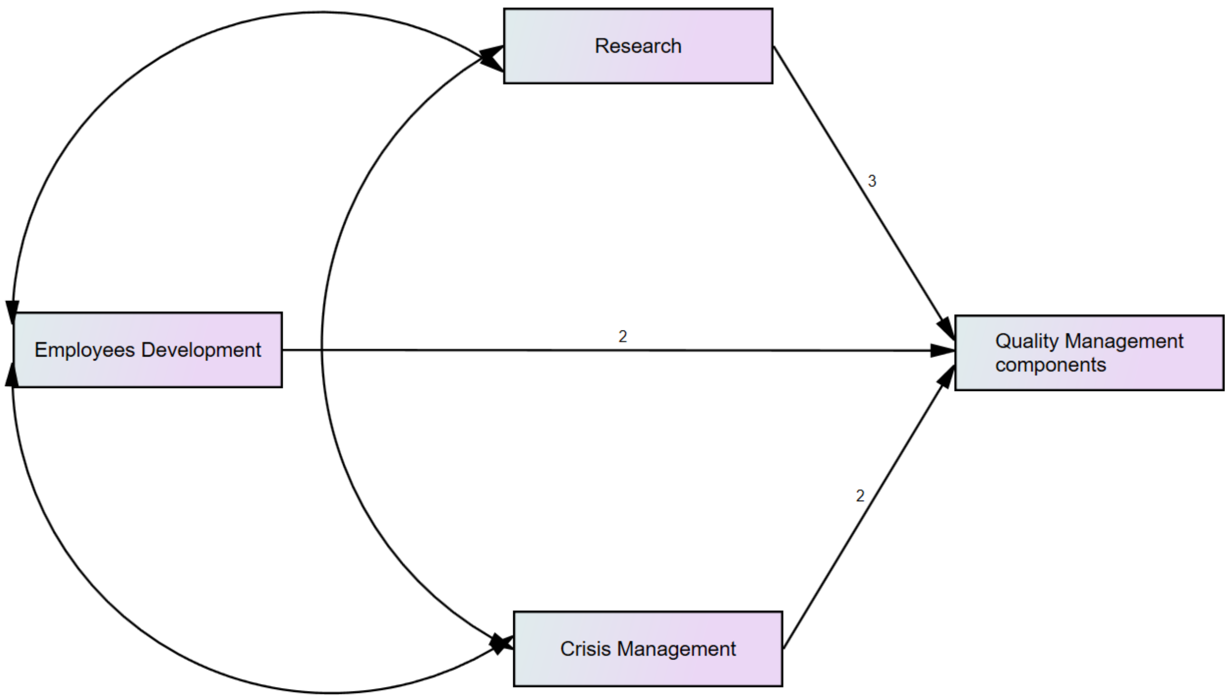


Figure 43: Service quality management enhancement

Source: Field data

8.4 PROPOSED MODEL DEVELOPMENT – SERVICE QUALITY PATH MODEL

Based on the aforementioned analysis on the issues of service quality, the study presented a service quality path model for TOs in tourism industry in the case of Cameroon. The model proposed that every TO must have established service quality framework supported by both national and international regulations. These guidelines provided basis for making policies regarding service quality management. It was hypothesised that a good framework resulted to positive service quality outputs. The quality of the output was either customer-centric or service-centric. Customer-centric outputs were set to satisfy the customers whereas service-centric outputs are designed to meet the service quality expectation of management.

In effect, this model proposes that both customer-centric and service-centric outcomes must be combined to achieve full-service quality objectives. The resulting effect of the service quality objective was to attain the zone of satisfaction. In the satisfaction zone, both customers and the ITO benefit from the service quality system. Customers were satisfied with the service quality rendered and the ITO benefits from the growth in market share and goodwill. This model was called the service quality path model for the ITO industry in Cameroon. This was depicted in Figure 44 as shown next.

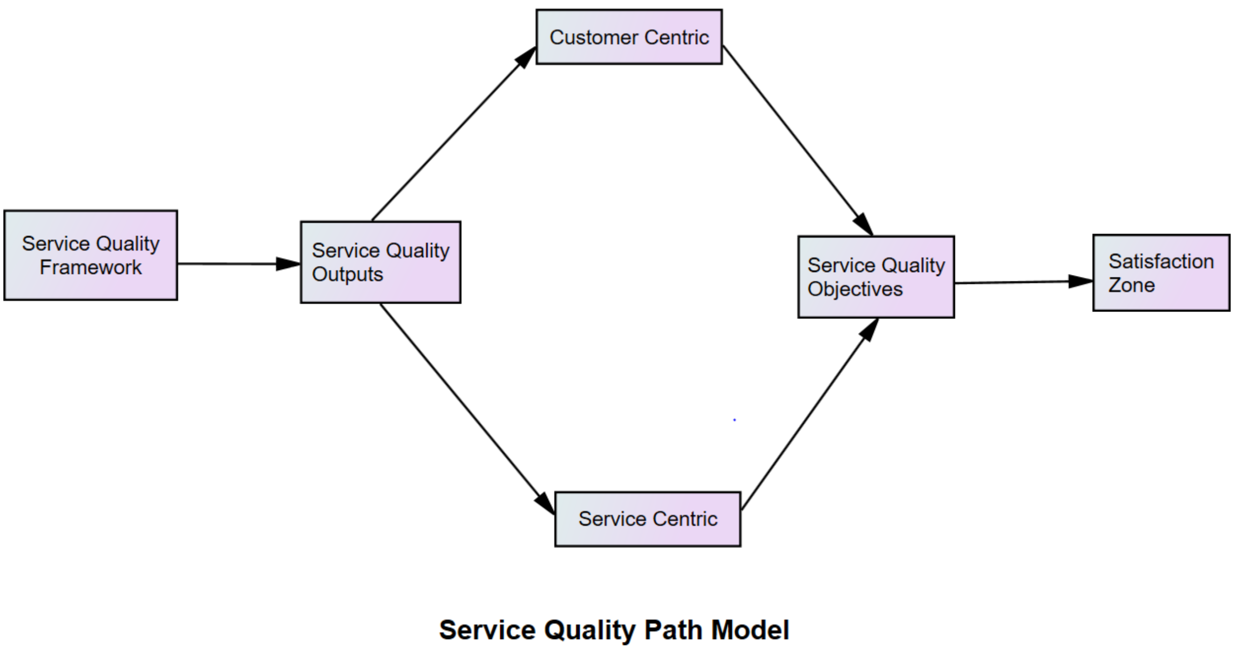


Figure 44: Service Quality Path Model
Source: Author's development

8.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter on qualitative analysis comprised descriptive statistics which involved a presentation of the results of the interview response rate for 12 respondents. A total of eight questions including three demographic questions and five core questions were completed with a total of seven industry experts' responses analysed. The demographic information of respondents had three points considered which gender [measured using binary categorical data] were meanwhile, age and experience were measured using continuous data structured in ranges. The gender representation consisted of four males and three females representing a sample size of seven interviewees. The age range of respondents represented a population of young and older adults ranging from 18 to 62 with the majority belonging in the age range of 41 years to 51 years. It was established that responses observed in the interview were sourced from well informed sample of people with stronger generational implications regarding the phenomenon of service quality in the TO industry in Cameroon. Service experience was measured based on three categories ranging from [2-12], [13-23] and [24-34]. It was realised from the field that the majority of the respondents had service experience between [13-23] years which was largely judged as appropriate. Inferential analysis applied the technique of grounded theory analysis. The primary objective of the grounded theory analysis was to generate themes emerging from qualitative data, which shall be approved upon the attainment of theoretical saturations via a series of continuous compounding analysis of opinions. It was anchored on three pillars; open coding process, axial coding process and selective coding process to address the following secondary research questions: What are the perspectives of ITO industry expert opinions of a working definition of service quality?; What are the major determinants of service quality as perceived by experts in the case of Cameroon TO industry?; What are the dynamics between service quality expectation and service quality perception as viewed by TO experts?

Based on the first objective on the perspectives of ITO industry expert opinions of a working definition of service quality, it was realised that the two concepts of service-centricity and customer-centricity were observed as themes for an appropriate working definition of service quality to suit the context of the TO industry. Customer perception and expectation must be carefully managed in light with service-centric activities as was acknowledged in this study that TOs must consider focusing attention to improve on service offerings with the intention of meeting the customer needs. The second objective explored the determinants of service quality as perceived by TO experts. After selective coding, it was concluded that hospitality was considered as the main determinant followed by safety and security, communication and price. The third objective dwelled on service quality perception and service quality expectation dynamics. Based on expert opinions, four indicators emerged presented in order of importance: market intelligence and research, objectivity, communication and growth in market share. The fourth objective focused on how to enhance quality management vis-à-vis service quality. According to expert opinion, six categories were identified as components to enhance quality management for the TO industry in Cameroon. These included market research, employees' development, crisis management, leadership, ISO, and ICT. However, expert opinions were typical of market research, employees' development and crisis management as strategic guidelines to boost service quality via quality management system.

When considering modelling a service quality evaluation framework, TO experts in this study postulates that the following factors must be put together in developing an effective service quality framework: ethics and guidelines; customers' feedback and review; technology; customers focused guidelines; benchmark analysis; market competitiveness; logistic and hygiene and sanitation. In this model of service quality framework based on TO experts' opinions, it was observed that service quality determinants, drivers and components influence the kind of service quality activities to be implemented. This study identified three levels of outcomes including positive service quality outcome, indifferent service quality outcome and negative service quality outcome.

This chapter ended with a proposed model developed for the ITO industry in Cameroon called the service quality path model presented in section 8.4. The model proposes that both customer-centric and service-centric outcomes must be combined to achieve full-service quality objectives. The resulting effect of the service quality objective was to attain the zone of satisfaction because in the zone of satisfaction, both the customers and the ITO benefit from the service quality system. Customers are satisfied with the service quality rendered and the ITO benefits from the growth in market share and goodwill. Chapter nine presents conclusions to the study and putting forward recommendations.

PART 4: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism as an economic activity is the breadbasket of Cameroon's economy. Much economic benefits are achieved in the short-term from tourism activities such as TO, travel agency, hotels, tourist sites etc. than with other economic activities bringing in competition. The competitive nature of these tourism activities requires that service quality is top notch. This happens through a comprehensive evaluation process in which there is a gap reduction of the customer expectation and perception levels by the service provider. According to Parasuraman, et al. (1988), the process by which customers evaluate a service is important, especially to service marketers. As a result, practitioners in the tourism service industry (and particularly the TO industry) and from past research conducted by other researchers indicate a must move towards understanding how customers assess service quality in an inclusive tour package (Chand & Ashish, 2014). Hence, to understand the customer perception and expectation of service quality, this study aimed to *model an effective and efficient service quality evaluation framework for the ITO industry in Cameroon*. This aim answered the research question put forward: *To what extent is it possible and feasible to elaborate and suggest a service quality assessment framework for the ITO industry?*

The research problem identified in this study and that precipitated this study to be conducted was that of poor service quality in a highly competitive TO industry. It stated further that there existed the general feeling of dissatisfaction of customers in the ITO industry. Using the sequential explanatory mixed methodology (see chapter 6) structured techniques like online survey and in-depth semi-structured interviews were used to collect the primary data. After the data analysis and triangulation, the quantitative results and qualitative findings obtained were presented in Chapter 7 and 8 respectively.

To address the problem stated above, the primary objective was to *model an effective and efficient service quality framework for ITOs in Cameroon*. The primary objective was accomplished through the realisation of the following nine secondary (4 quantitative and 5 qualitative) objectives.

Quantitative Objectives

I. To evaluate the effects of customer service quality expectation on service quality in the ITO industry.
II. To examine the effects of customer service quality perception on service quality in the ITO industry.
III. To determine the influence of customer service experience on service quality in the ITO industry.
IV. To identify the quality-of-service determinant factors unique to the ITO industry.

Qualitative Objectives

I. To underscore the ITO industry experts' opinions of a working definition of service quality.
II. To empirically determine the major determinants of service quality in the ITO industry.
III. To identify the dynamics between service quality expectation and service quality perception as viewed by Cameroon TO industry experts.
IV. To understand the concept of service quality and its evaluation models by conducting a literature review.
V. To identify areas of quality management aimed at improving service quality in the ITO industry.

The next sub-section presents a reflection of my PhD journey highlighting areas where doctoral students and scholars could review or strengthen their research.

9.1.1 Reflection on my PhD journey

My doctoral experience was one of perseverance and patience. Discipline all through this period was my watch word most especially as the work was the responsibility of the research student. As a part time student and a full time employee, I had to strike a balance to keep both studies and professional work moving which was quite a difficult challenge. Studying for this PhD was a life of sacrifice from family time and personal activities. I had to work extra hard mentally and psychologically with so many write-ups, modifications and revisions characterising my studies. The PhD study process was very thought-provoking, stressful and even discouraging at times but I had to keep the positive mind-set of not quitting for "nothing good comes easy". It was important during the PhD journey to have committed supervisors and advisors who encouraged and guided you to develop your ideas in a presentable way through your writing style.

The topic chosen for this study was based on my personal interest and passion for the delivery of good quality service in the TO and the tourism industry at large. Having worked for over nine years in the travel agency and TO industry in the two major cities of Cameroon, the researcher had a good mastery of the terrain. During that time, I had personal encounters with many customers who were disgruntled over poor service quality delivered to them at one time or another. For instance, employees were reckless in front of a customer, employees poking their fingers into the nose while attending to a customer, long waiting time to service customers among others. As a service marketing professional in the tourism industry, I could better relate with some of these issues and these kept me thinking what contribution I could bring to help solve the problem. From previous research studies related to the topic under investigation, I realised that poor quality service was a major challenge in the tourism industry in Cameroon and even in SSA. Reason why it was therefore imminent for such research to be conducted. During my field work, I had to deal with challenging situations with respondents who were non collaborative, others did not respect appointments, others got disinterested in continuing to answer the questionnaire. Learning the skills of negotiations, compromise and communication remained invaluable in my life.

Conducting this research has widened my scope of thought in the area of service quality and customer focus orientation especially in the tourism industry. It is a pivotal element for the success of tourism and service oriented businesses. This topic is continually evolving and requires continuous research for a better understanding through publications by other researchers.

The next sections presented the conclusions and recommendations of the data analysis as per the secondary objectives. What followed was a conclusion of the proposed holistic evaluation framework for this study and a presentation and discussion on the contributions, implications and limitations of this study. Recommendations for future research was then examined and the chapter culminated with a conclusion.

9.2 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF DATA ANALYSIS

This section presents a summary of the findings and results obtained from the previous chapters of this study anchored on the research aim, research questions and research objectives. The aim of this study was to *model an effective and efficient service quality evaluation framework for the ITO industry in Cameroon*. This aim answered the research question put forward which was to understand: *To what extent is it possible and feasible to elaborate and suggest a service quality assessment framework for the (inbound) TO industry?* In response, the service quality path model proposed in this study was presented in Chapter 8, section 8.4. A brief explanation of the flow of this model was explained in section 9.3.

The problem of a rather poor service quality in a highly competitive industry identified in this research was substantiated by a series of issues identified in Chapter 1 and addressed in Chapter 8, with tourism experts during the interviews stating that issues such as market research, employee development, crisis management and leadership relating to ITOs' success in Cameroon was very important. The next sub-sections discussed and provided conclusions on the achievement of the different secondary objectives.

1. **To evaluate the effects of customer service quality expectation on service quality in the ITO industry**

This secondary objective corresponded with the research question: "To what extent does customer service quality expectation influence service quality in the ITO industry?"

In today's economy, the customer is and remains the king. Having knowledge of the expectations of the customer is the starting point to understanding the customer needs, hence tailoring a service offering to provide satisfactory service quality. Sayareh et al. (2016:204) note that Grönroos (1984) argued that service quality depended on the attributes of service expectation. Statistics from the data analysis obtained in this study indicated that a cumulative percentage of customer respondents agreed [45.1%] that they had high service quality expectations from ITOs in Cameroon as against 1.6% who disagreed. Furthermore, the empirical quantitative analysis indicated that the total perception [P = 3.81] and the total expectation [E = 4.46]. From the equation $Q=P-E$, the service quality value was [Q = -0.65] (see section 7.3.40). This implied that the service quality expectation was higher than the service quality perception. This indicated that customers of ITOs in Cameroon rely very much on ITO to receive excellent service quality. Therefore, service quality expectation had a positive effect on service quality. Details were provided in section 2.7, 2.9 and 2.10.

2. **To examine the effects of customer service quality perception on service quality in the ITO industry**

This secondary objective corresponded with the research question: “To what extent does service quality perception affect the service quality in the ITO industry? Theories related to service quality were developed since the 1990s with various studies focusing on the rapport concerning service quality perception (Basiony et al., 2014). In a study conducted within the hotel industry in Croatia, Markovic and Jankovic (2013) discussed the existing bond between service quality perception and satisfied customer. Their research findings indicated that quality service in hotels was of significance in predicting customer satisfaction which concurs with studies conducted by Choo, Cheng, & Yeo, 2018 and Sam, Hamidu & Daniels, 2018. The analytical studies showed that evaluation of a service should be based on the perceived service quality and not as a gap between expectations and perception of performance. In China’s hotel industry, Tsang and Qu (2000) assessed service quality perceptions based on both the international tourists and the hotel managers’ viewpoints. It was reported that in China, tourist’s service quality perception was rated lower than anticipations whereas hotel managers overrated the service delivery (Narayan et al., 2009:83). The findings from the empirical quantitative analysis of this study indicated that the total perception [P = 3.81] and the total expectation [E = 4.46]. From the equation $Q=P-E$, the service quality value was [Q = -0.65]. Full analytical discussions are contained in section 7.3.40. This insinuated that the service quality perception was lower than the service quality expectation in this study. There were reasons for a poor service quality culture in the ITO industry in Cameroon which needed to be improved upon. It was rightly concluded that consumer service quality perception could be influential on service quality.

3. **To determine the influence of customer service experience on service quality in the ITO industry**

This secondary objective corresponded with the research question: "To what extent does service experience influence service quality in the ITO industry?" In a TO company, the tour package composed of hotel, catering and beverage, transport, leisure activities etc. proposed to tourists is very important. The way such services all combined in a package are delivered to customers gives that sense of service quality and enables them to rate whether they are getting a high or low value. According to Otto and Richie (2000), service experience was a major connector between the service quality experience and the satisfaction of tourists which included the service element composed of managerial roots and the service experience element having psychological roots (Darfoon, 2013). Service quality was defined as the resultant effect from comparing the expectations of a customer before the service was being offered and a customer's service experiences (Liljander & Strandviz, 1993:6). Customer service experience in this study referred to how long the customer was using the services of the ITO with the understanding that a customer having a good service experience would continue to use the services of the service provider. From the data analysis, over two-thirds (66.7%) of customer respondents had more than two years of service experience using the ITO services while 100% of manager respondents had more than two years of service experience. These outcomes were judged as appropriate and representative of the total sample population. It can therefore be concluded that customer service experience influences service quality in the ITO industry.

4. **To underscore the ITO industry experts' opinions of a working definition of service quality**

This secondary objective corresponded with the research question: "What are the perspectives of ITO industry expert opinions of a working definition of service quality? There are several internationally recognised definitions for service quality. According to the Gap model developed by Oliver (1980), service quality was defined as that existing space of a service expectation versus perception delivered to the customer. Therefore, there are different perspectives of service quality. According to the American perspective, service quality could be assessed dependent on the dimension of functional quality, explained through the dimensions including tangibility, reliability, responsibility, assurance, and empathy (Kang and

James, 2004:268). While according to the European perspective, service quality must have all three components comprising the technical and functional qualities and corporate image. From the empirical data analysis, two main perspectives of a working definition of service quality were identified. These are customer-centric and service-centric perspectives. It was observed in this study that customer-centric activities related to any type of strategy applied by TOs to make and keep their customers happy to have consumed their services. The service-centric perspective included all activities centred around making sure that services were attractive, profitable and met corporate objectives and missions. This was more directly linked to ITO management preoccupations. This study showed that these activities included themes such as lean management aimed at minimising waste of resources. Under the service-centric perspective, quality was achieved to meet stated organisational objectives. Furthermore, the service-centric mind-sets related to making evaluation between planned and actual performance result in respect to service quality measurement. Therefore, the TO must consider focusing its attention to improve on service offerings with the intention of meeting the needs of their customers. Customer perception and expectation must be carefully managed in light with service-centric activities. In as much as TOs are focused on service-centric operations, the customer's objectives must be achieved simultaneously. Customer-centric activities were therefore set to meet customer satisfaction.

5. To identify the service quality determinant factors unique to the ITO industry

This secondary objective focused on picking out the unique service quality elements for ITOs in this study. From the review of literature presented in chapter 2, previous studies such as Parasuraman et al. (1985:48) from their focus group studies involving customers and service providers developed a list of determinants of service quality. These included competence, communication, access, reliability, credibility, courtesy, understanding, responsiveness, tangibles and security (Johnston, 1995:54). According to Grönroos (1984), an organisation must identify first and understand the customer's perspective with regards to service quality to produce, deliver and maintain quality service. In the tourism industry, Narayan, Rajendran, Sai and Gopalan (2009:74) through an extensive literature review in an exploratory study carried out, proposed ten dimensions of service quality relevant to tourism. These comprised logistics, core-tourism experience, hygiene, information, value for money, hospitality, price fairness, amenities, security, and food. Understanding that the current study applied the SERVQUAL model and TO quality model to be able to design the holistic service quality evaluation framework, from the quantitative data analysis, the following service quality determinants were identified. The five observed independent latent constructs of the study included empathy, assurance, responsiveness, reliability and tangibility while Service Quality Evaluation was considered as the one dependent latent construct. These constructs were operationalised using 11 major service quality determinant factors in the TO industry in Cameroon [hospitality, value for money, safety and security, tour quality, ability to resolve problems, use of technology, time management, price, communication and information, hygiene and sanitation, logistics and amenities]. These were regrouped as follows *empathy* [hospitality; value for money], *assurance* [safety and security; tour quality], *responsiveness* [ability to resolve problems; use of technology; time management], *reliability* [price; communication and information] and *tangibility* [hygiene and sanitation; logistics and amenities].

6. **To explore the major determinants of service quality as perceived by experts in the ITO industry**

This secondary objective corresponded to the research question: "What are the major determinants of service quality as perceived by experts in the case of Cameroon TO industry?" From the literature review presented in chapter 2, previous studies showed that each industry has its set of unique factors. From their focus group studies involving customers and service providers, Parasuraman et al. (1985:48) developed a list of determinants of service quality. These included competence, communication, access, reliability, credibility, courtesy, understanding, responsiveness, tangibles and security (Johnston, 1995:54). After further research was conducted, the five dimensions of service quality then became reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness. These formed the basis of the SERVQUAL model – their service quality measurement tool. Johnston et al. (1990) conducted a study that tested the comprehensive nature of service quality determinants developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) for ten UK service organisations. Following their analysis which supported Parasuraman et al.'s (1988) model determinants, they proposed a refined list consisting of 12 determinants, namely; appearance, cleanliness, access, availability, competence, comfort, friendliness, courtesy, communication, security, reliability and responsiveness (Johnston, 1995:55). Johnston and Silvestro (1990) customer's viewpoint to the 12 determinants of service quality already identified added five more determinants; namely; care, commitment, attentiveness, integrity and functionality (Johnston, 1995:55). For this current study, based on the answers obtained during the quantitative phase, the interviewees were guided in their responses during the qualitative data collection process. After data analysis, it was noticed that the expert views were slightly modified. During the open data coding process, the following major service quality determinants were identified after attainment of theoretical saturation; safety and security, hospitality, communication and price. After further analysis, it was concluded that the major service quality determinant factors in the TO industry in order of importance are hospitality [4]; safety and security [3]; communication [3] and price [1].

7. **To identify the dynamics between service quality expectation and service quality perception as viewed by Cameroon tour operator industry experts**

This secondary objective corresponded with the research question: "What are the dynamics between service quality expectation and service quality perception as viewed by the TO?" The dynamics of service quality focused on service quality perception and service quality expectations. From the review of literature, service quality perception was understood to be a comparison between a standard to a particular performance (Suuroja, 2003:11). Grönroos (1984:37) defined the service quality perception as the result of an assessment process, in which customers compared their service expectations with what they have received. Meanwhile, expectations were viewed as simply the customer's wants of what should be offered by the service provider. It was important for ITOs in Cameroon to understand the views of customers regarding marketing offerings. From the qualitative data analysis conducted for this study, tourism experts identified four main concepts emerged and were presented in order of importance namely: market intelligence and research, objectivity, communication, and growth in market share. This was explained as conducting regular market research to have the capacity of market intelligence to understand market behaviour and trend. Objectivity of service quality package can also provide the basis to match perception and expectation. Once management defined the guidelines of expected service quality threshold, then the delivery will be guided to meet such standard.

8. **To understand the concept of service quality and its evaluation models by conducting a literature review**

This secondary objective set out to conduct an extensive literature review of service quality and service quality assessment models from previous studies carried out by other researchers were reported in Chapter 2, 3 and 4.

Chapter 2 provided an overview of the concept of service quality, examined the existing assessment models found in existing literature. Basic definitions of the concept of service quality from different authors were discussed. The history and evolution of the concept of service quality and its evaluation, first developed by Grönroos (1984) and applied by Parasuraman et al. (1985) was presented next. Not left out was a presentation of the service concept as was first used by Sasser et al. (1978) to explain the elements that ought to be sold to a customer (Paulišić et al., 2016:235). Next for discussion was the service culture which stressed on the fact that within the tourism industry, having a service culture was a precondition for an organisation's excellent service quality and business efficiency. It was also important to discuss the human interactions that occurred in a service encounter. Following was the service quality characterisation which basically included perishability, heterogeneity, intangibility, inseparability (Parasuraman et al. 1985; Kotler & keller, 2009; Ganesh & Haslinda 2014:1190) and ownership (Evans, 2015:685). The determinant factors of service quality and its dimensions suggested by different researchers such as Berry et al. (1985) and Johnston and Silvestro (1990) were presented in section 2.8. There was equally a broad investigation on service quality conceptualisation from the Rust and Oliver model (1994); dynamic process service quality model to the very well-known SERVQUAL model. The service quality measurement item scales for tourism businesses like TOs were explored in section 2.10. Relevant service quality models cited in tourism literature were discussed in section 2.11. These models stemmed from modifications of the SERVQUAL model depending on the sector being researched. Lastly, service quality was improved through the implementation of several policies and practices as was discussed in section 2.13.

Chapter 3 explored previous studies on the concept of customer experience. Customer experience was all about the memories a customer has in the mind after interacting with a service provider. The importance of customer experience was in trying to understand the role of the customer in an interaction that would lead to better service quality. Discussions started with basic definitions of customer experience as captured by previous research studies. This study observed the common point in all these definitions were the theme of consumer-supplier communication that happened during the encounter. Customer experience comprised various rudiments and perspectives such as physical, emotional, subconscious, rational and psychological (Shaw & Hamilton, 2016:8). To be able to form a positive customer experience, there are four important elements that must be present – responsiveness, reliability, relevance and convenience. In the literature reviewed in section 3.3, there are four types of customer experience showing the level of interaction between the customer and service provider which included: entertainment (passive/absorption); educational (active/absorption); aesthetics (passive/immersion) and escapist (active/immersion). Also discussed were the conceptual models of customer experience such as SERVQUAL, Customer Experience Model, eTailQ Experience Model, E-S-QUAL Model, EXQ Framework (section 3.5). These models presented are truly relevant to this study as they helped to achieve this secondary objective: "To determine the influence of customer experience on service quality in the ITO industry." It was understood that it is far less costly to maintain existing customers than to conquer new ones. The reason why organisations are investing in "database marketing", "relationship management" and "customer planning" just to have a clear understanding of their customers (Hill & Alexander, 2016:1).

This last chapter of the literature review comprised examining, analysing and discussing the existing literature on service quality and its assessment models building up from the chapter 2 and 3. This chapter examined the theoretical underpinnings related to service quality such as the performance-only approach, the disconfirmation approach, the importance-performance analysis and the pivotal-core-peripheral (p-c-p) approach as seen in section 4.2. Based on the disconfirmation approach, two principal perspectives existed concerning the service quality dimensions. Firstly, it was the Nordic model developed by Grönroos (1984) which made use of the technical and functional qualities that helped define service quality evaluation. Secondly, the SERVQUAL model (called also as the American perspective) developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) made use of the attributes of an encounter in a service to explain service quality as a total ration of its constituents. Equally, there were discussions on how to measure customer experience such as profiling the customer and developing personas; leaving no touch points; tackling the key problem areas; and how it links to service quality evaluation as seen in section 4.3. Also, this chapter critically analysed the pioneer and most applied service quality assessment model, the SERVQUAL and its evolution and modifications as applied in different studies over the years for instance Gap model (1985), SERVQUAL (1988), SITEQUAL (2001), E-S-QUAL (2005); CASERV (2012), AIRQUAL (2015) as seen in section 4.4. Furthermore, the chapter presented some issues raised about the SERVQUAL measurement like there is even some debating going on in literature whether customer satisfaction and service quality are two separate ideas and how are their true natures different as seen in section 4.5.

9. **To identify areas of quality management aimed at improving service quality in the ITO industry**.

Quality management principles are universally accepted and practised within organisations to provide solutions to the needs of customers and compliance to the regulations guiding the activities of that particular sector. Quality management within the context of service quality was all about the management process of service delivery to customers according to their specific expectations. In essence, it examined the level at which a service was offered so that its quality was assessed and if found wanting be improved upon in the future, identify problems and ensure they are corrected so as to improve on customer satisfaction. The goal behind every successful organisation was always seeking means and ways to improve service quality through the implementation of its rules and policies. From the literature review presented in section 8.3.5, some of these policies and practices that improve service quality included abiding by the International Quality Standards (ISO 9000); developing a strategic orientation from the onset; quick recovery of failed service and good marketing alignment. These strategies are necessary for TOs to gain international recognition awards and respect among their peers and even competitors. From the qualitative data analysis conducted for this study and presented in section 8.3.5, experts opinion identified six categories as components for service quality enhancement in the ITO industry in Cameroon. These included research, employees' development and crisis management [as strategic guidelines to boost service quality via quality management system] leadership, ISO and ICT. It was believed that these strategies must be implemented together in an organised sequence of guidelines (as presented in the operational framework of this study) to yield the required outcome as presented in the suggested service quality pathway model.

Summary findings of multiple regression hypothesis testing

From the research objectives, questions and review of literature presented in chapter two, the following hypotheses were generated and proposed for this study. Multiple regression analyses were run to determine the causal relationships between the variables of the study in line with the hypotheses of the study which included:

H_1: Empathy has a positive significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation;
H_2: Assurance has a positive significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation;
H_3: Responsiveness has a positive significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation;
H_4: Reliability has a positive significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation; and
H_5: Tangibility has a positive significant relationship with Service Quality Evaluation.

Based on the regression model, five specific independent latent constructs [empathy, assurance, responsiveness, reliability and tangibility] were tested in hypothetical relations with the dependent latent construct [service quality evaluation]. Based on the analysis of the regression model, the overall predictive power of the model as revealed by the coefficient of Adjusted R Square = 0.195, these implied that the predictors in the model relating to tangibility, empathy, reliability, responsiveness, and assurance accounted for 20% of the variation caused on Service Quality Evaluation with Std. Error of the Estimate = 0.49388. In conclusion, **H_1** declines to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there is insignificant statistical evidence to suggest that empathy has a positive significant effect on service quality evaluation. **H_2** declines to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there is insignificant statistical evidence to suggest that assurance has a positive significant effect on service quality evaluation. **H_3** declines to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there is insignificant statistical evidence to suggest that responsiveness has a positive significant effect on service quality evaluation. **H_4** declines to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was insignificant statistical evidence to suggest that reliability has a positive significant effect on service quality evaluation. **H_5** declines to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is insignificant statistical evidence to suggest that tangibility has a positive significant effect on service quality evaluation.

Summary findings of ANOVA test

ANOVA tests were conducted to verify whether there were any variances that were statistically significant variances between the groups for the demographic variables age and level of qualification. From the data analysis and based on the test of hypotheses, the study revealed that tangibility [$\mu = 0.313 > 0.05$], empathy [$\mu = 0.255 > 0.05$], reliability [$\mu = 0.465 > 0.05$], and assurance [$\mu = 0.491 > 0.05$] have statistically insignificant influences on Service Quality Evaluation whereas there was significant statistical evidence that responsiveness influences Service Quality Evaluation [$\mu = 0.004 < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.0401$]. To ascertain the suitability of the model, ANOVA analysis was conducted and the test of model fit revealed that at regression model 1, with Sum of Squares = 8.488, Degree of Freedom = 5, F-Test = 6.930, and Mean= 1.698 showed that the model was statistically significant and therefore, the data fits the model at P-V = 0.000 (see chapter 7, section 7.8).

9.3 PROPOSED HOLISTIC FRAMEWORK

This section is based on the primary objective of this study which was *to develop a holistic framework for an effective and efficient assessment of ITO service quality in Cameroon* (see chapter 5). This framework was conceptualised based on the review of literature on service quality evaluation models, and in line with the objectives of this study stated in section 1.4.2.1 and the empirical findings of this study.

This empirical study helped developed a service quality evaluation framework for the ITO industry in Cameroon with the consideration of industry experts opinion sample. The service quality evaluation framework provided 11 factors factors to ensure that the service quality perception matched with the service quality expectation within the ITO industry in Cameroon. The service quality framework factors identified by Cameroon ITO industry experts must be integrated together when designing the service quality evaluation framework. These factors included ethics and guidelines, customers' feedback and review, technology, customers focused guidelines, benchmark analysis, market competiveness, logistic and hygiene and sanitation.

The understanding of experts' opinions could be enhanced by integrating all these service quality components/factors together when designing an effective service quality manual.

Developing well established ethical guidelines was strategic and key for top management of the ITO. Collecting customers' feedback and conducting reviews regularly with the intention to enhance service quality operations was vital. Technology was equally essential as it brought into play the element of innovation and enhances customers' tastes. A comprehensive framework should cater for logistics and sanitation. Lastly, integrating benchmarking analysis helped to evaluate the extent to which the service quality manual was effective and efficient. The framework must be aligned with the service quality path model.

The proposed service quality path model claims that TOs must have established a service quality evaluation framework supported by both national and international regulations [ISO 9000]. These internal guidelines provided the basis for making policies regarding service quality management for the ITO.

According to the proposed service quality path model, a proper implementation of the service quality framework factors leads to the quality of output which could either be customer-centric and service-centric. Customer-centric outputs are set to satisfy the customers' needs whereas service-centric outputs are objectively designed to meet service quality expectations by the ITO management. In effect, this model proposed that to meet with service quality objectives, both customer-centric and service-centric outcomes must be combined. The resulting effects of the service quality objectives are to attain the zone of satisfaction. In the satisfaction zone, both customers and the ITO (managers and employees) benefit from the effective and efficient service quality evaluation system put in place as presented in the operational model (section 5.5). At the end, customers are very satisfied with the service quality rendered while the ITO benefits from the growth in market share and goodwill. The service quality evaluation framework must offer competitive edge to the ITO industry.

In the qualitative data analysis of this study and based on the opinions of ITO industry experts on the issues of service quality assessment, this study therefore, proposed and presented the service quality path model for ITOs as seen in Figure 44.

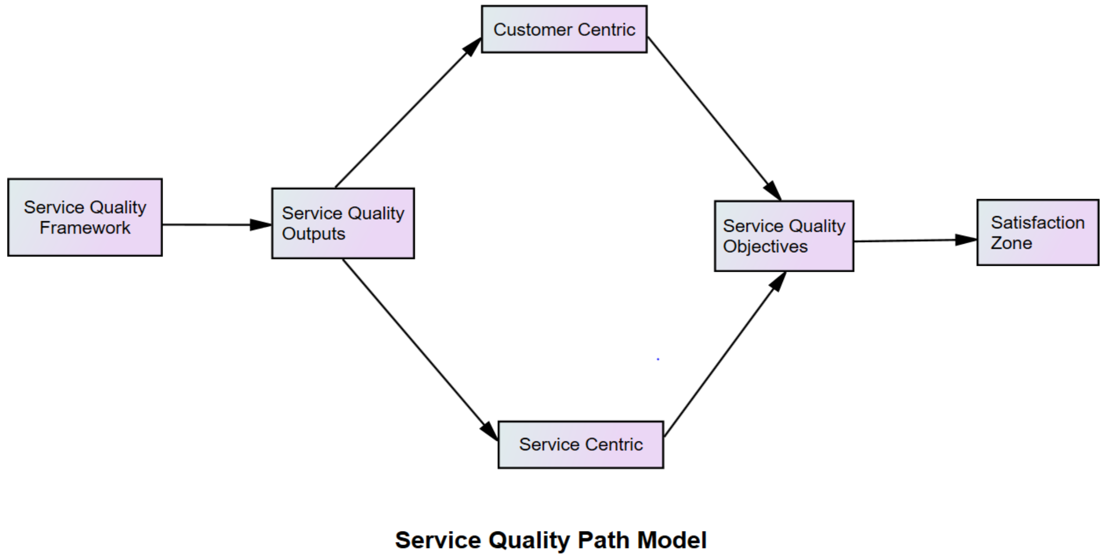


Figure 44: Service quality path model for ITOs

From Figure 44, it was clear that there were two perspectives, namely; customer-centric and service-centric perspectives. It was observed in this study that customer-centric activities related to any type of strategy applied by TOs to make and keep their customers satisfied to have consumed their services. The service-centric perspective included all activities focused around making sure that services are attractive, profitable and meeting corporate objectives and missions.

This was more directly linked to ITO management preoccupations. This study showed that these activities included themes such as lean management aimed at minimising waste of resources. Under the service-centric perspective, quality was achieved to meet stated organisational objectives. Furthermore, the service-centric mind-sets relate to making evaluation between planned and actual performance result in respect to service quality measurement. Therefore, the TO must consider focusing its attention to improve on service offerings with the intention of meeting the needs of their customers. Customer perception and expectation must be carefully managed in light with service-centric activities. In as much as TOs are focused on service-centric operations, the customer's objectives must be achieved simultaneously. Customer-centric activities are therefore set to meet customer satisfaction.

The proposed service quality evaluation framework based on ITO expert's opinions was discussed in section 5.4 and section 9.3 observed that service quality dimensions, and items influence the kind of service quality activities to be implemented. However, the extent of these factors cumulates to determine the likelihood that service quality perception meets service quality expectations. The analysis of the state of the outcomes was based on benchmarking by comparing planned service quality expectations to the actual service quality outcomes. To this effect, the empirical study identified three levels of outcomes:

I. *Positive service quality outcome*: In this case, the service quality perception was higher than the service quality expectation. A positive service quality outcome generated a zone of comfort. This zone brought growth, profits and more referrals. This was translated to mean that good service quality was delivered to customers. Managers and employees are supposed to understand the customer needs. This was owing to the proper execution of the service quality evaluation framework. This was the goal of any business venture to increase sales.

II. *Indifferent service quality outcome*: In this case, the service quality outcome was zero. This happened when the generated service quality produces no significant change in customer satisfaction. The hypothetical premise suggested that changes in service quality must result in changes in customer satisfaction zone. This was inferred to mean that customers are indifferent in their decision whether service expectation is same as service perception. For ITOs here it was not the best position to be but rather seek ways to move to the positive satisfaction zone. It was very important for ITOs to make only changes that will result in creating a zone of satisfaction. Otherwise, this outcome should result in costly blunders and waste of resources.

III. *Negative service quality outcome*: In this case, the service quality perception was lower than the service quality expectation. This situation generated the zone of customers' dissatisfactions, which was translated into poor quality service, loss of profit, drop in market share, loss of customers and goodwill of the business. This scenario happens when managers and employees do not understand the customer needs and this may lead to service failure. Negative service quality outcome must be avoided by the TOs at all costs as it causes great mismatch between service quality perception and service quality expectations. Several strategies proposed in this study could be applied to enhance service quality perception. Organisations do not like this scenario because there is more loss than gain.

The proposed framework for this study adds to the already existing wide array of assessment models (presented in section 9.2) developed by researchers following the extension of the SERVQUAL model to give a newly modified model. For instance, Knutson, Stevens, Wullaert and Patton (1991) developed the LODGSERV model for the evaluation of hotel services while maintaining the original dimensions. For travel agencies, Le Blanc (1992) realised that the dimension of brand image should be included in the service quality dimensions. In more recent research, Pakdil and Aydin (2007) developed for the airline sector, a weighted SERVQUAL after they added four more dimensions (availability, employees, flight pattern and image) to the original SERVQUAL dimensions. This created an appropriate measurement scale for airline service quality. Among the results of their study, they discovered that the level of education and passengers' past experiences obviously affect the passenger's expectations and experience.

Albacete-Saez, Fuentes-Fuentes and Liorens-Montes (2007) developed a modified SERVQUAL scale to measure service quality in nature-based tourism with special focus on rural tourism. They had seven dimensions: complementary offers, personnel response, basic demand, tourist relations, security, empathy and tangible elements. Their developed scale had 58 elements designed to measure the quality expectations and perceptions that were concurrently shared (Darfoon, 2013:35). Khan (2003) modified the SERVQUAL model to assess the service quality perception of tourists at eco-tourism destinations. He developed the ECOSERV model. Tribe and Snaith (1998) the HOLSAT model developed from the SERVQUAL model. This modified construct measured tourist's satisfaction in holiday experiences. Other scholars have modified other models. For instance, Caro and Garcia (2008) established a multidimensional model on service quality construct following that of Brady and Cronin (2001). Brady and Cronin (2001) postulate that customer evaluation of service quality needed a multi-level scale that was made up of primary dimensions and sub-dimensions so as to measure service quality. Caro and Garcia (2008) after qualitative and quantitative analysis built the new model to measure service quality in travel agencies.

9.4 CONTRIBUTIONS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This section presented discussions on the contributions of this study to the body of knowledge on service quality evaluation. Also, there was a presentation of the implications and the limitations of the study in the next sub-sections.

9.4.1 Contributions

This study's contributions were categorised under two main headings: academic/ theoretical and practical contributions. The next sub-sections elaborated on these contributions.

9.4.1.1 Academic / Theoretical contribution

Firstly, the study extended the limited research on the understanding and existing relationship between the independent variables [empathy, assurance, responsiveness, reliability, and tangibility] and dependent variable [service quality evaluation]. *Secondly*, existing research on service quality evaluation framework development focused on other settings other than ITOs. This is one of the latest studies to assess service quality evaluation and its effect on ITOs' staff (managers and employees) service quality outcome in the TO industry. This study integrated two theoretical approaches: the TO service quality model and the SERVQUAL model. The TO service quality model was developed by Pilelienė and Simkus (2012) and was founded based on the analysis, criticism and improvement of the three service quality evaluation models described as being suitable for tourism businesses namely: Grönroos' (1984) worked on the Perceived Service Quality model; Parasuraman et al.'s (1985, 1988) on the Service Gap model and Brogowicz et al.'s (1990) on the Synthesized Service Quality model. The second model, the SERVQUAL model, was the instrument to measure service quality based on the difference in service quality expectation and perception. Service quality perception was understood to be an assessment process in which customers compared their service expectations with what they have received (Suuroja, 2003:11; Grönroos, 1984:37). Meanwhile service quality expectations were viewed as simply the customer's wants of what should be offered by the service provider. Based on literature presented in section 2.3, Grapentine (1988) and Parasuraman et al. (1988) in their study provided the formula $Q = P- E$ [Service quality was equal to service perception minus service expectation] to measure service quality. They also stated that past studies showed that each industry had its set of unique determinant factors. *Thirdly*, based on the TO service quality model and the SERVQUAL model applied in the study, this study extended the research concerning service quality evaluation by investigating how service quality determinant factors unique to the ITO industry could improve service quality assessment. Therefore, it ascertained the significant importance of the ITO service quality determinants [items (hospitality, value for money, ability to resolve problems, the use of technology, time management, price, communication and information, hygiene and sanitation, logistics and amenities to service quality] to service quality evaluation. The study added to the theoretical development by integrating the dimensions of the TO service quality evaluation model and the SERVQUAL model with service quality evaluation.

The findings of this research proposed the service quality path model as a possible solution to improve service quality in the TO industry in Cameroon. SERVQUAL remains the championing model widely applied in different industries despite its criticisms in applicability and psychometric properties. This model was a rebrand of the SERVQUAL model within the context of the ITO industry, therefore a valid contribution to the existing service quality evaluation theories. The methodological contribution indicated that these research findings could serve as a guiding tool for similar studies on the methodology (research approaches or sampling techniques) to obtain a better, more appropriate and representative sample frame whose findings could be generalised. Equally, the findings of this study contributed to the development of the pragmatism paradigm, therefore adding to existing methodology literature.

Studies in the field of service quality assessment though widely conducted around the world, however, remain limited within the TO industry. Therefore, more focused research was needed to exploit this field of study as vital inferences were drawn from this study's findings that supports past studies that measure the SERVQUAL dimensions [empathy, assurance, responsiveness, reliability and tangibility] variables with service quality assessment. Previous studies conducted examined some of these study variables to bring forth new service quality assessment models over time as presented and discussed in section 4.4 [Table 8] but just a few fully integrated all together these variables. Scholars/researchers usd such study results to replicate the research, compare or contrast the research findings or exploit new knowledge spaces thereby advancing and contributing to the body of knowledge.

9.4.1.2 Practical contribution

The conceptual framework of this study had practical implications to the TOs. They could apply this framework to examine and analyse the influential variables between service quality determinants factors (empathy [hospitality; value for money], assurance [safety and security; tour quality], responsiveness [ability to resolve problems; use of technology; time management], reliability [price; communication and information] and tangibility [hygiene and sanitation; logistics and amenities]) and service quality evaluation. Therefore, they could design and sell better tour packages. Equally, another important way for TO companies to enhance service quality was to optimise their company's service culture to improve the ITO managers and employees' motivation and positive emotions during the service experience process. The moderating role of emotions suggested that emotional intelligence training was very significant in helping TOs enhance customer perception level and therefore, reducing the gap in service quality evaluation.

This study suggested an operational framework for TOs in Cameroon which was a practical guide that could be applied by the management of TO companies. This integrated operational system had five steps which were easy to follow by managers and supervisors and feedback reported to hierarchy. Beginning from the top management (CEO's, founders / owners) of companies down to the front office employees, applying this framework would instil a sense of service quality awareness among the ITO staff putting them on the same wavelength when offering a service and this helped ease the process of delivering excellent service quality. Marketers in particular stood to benefit from this framework in that it helped them understand better how the customer thinks, feels and reacts to different situations. More importantly, marketers were able to develop customer personas and conduct customer segmentation profiles so that the service quality offering was most adapted to a specific customer or group of customers.

To the TO company, the suggested service quality evaluation framework benefitted them as relevant valuable information [such as type of tours desired, class of hotels to sleep in, kind of culinary requested, customer preferred mode of transport etc.] were obtained of the customer perspective. This brought about harmonisation of ideas and a reduction in the customer perception-expectation gap, hence improved service quality. Also, the framework could be applied in the day-to-day operations of the TO company thereby causing a shift in the mind-set to a more customer focused one for ITO managers and employees. This positively changes the organisational culture of the company as there was more awareness about offering good service quality to the customer. Eventually, the ITO stands out among its competitors owing to their impressive style of delivering service quality. This resulted in a spill over effect as new customers will be onboarded, old customers will repeat sales and the corporate image boosted.

This study advocated for the consideration of the perspectives of managers, employees and customers as per the conceptual model suggested in this study as against some studies in the stream of service quality measurement (Hudson et al., 2004) that focused only at the customers. All these actors were very important in achieving a complete service quality measurement as all ideas were put on the table and considered for the best decision to be taken which was void of biase. This angle gave a much more balanced view when offering good service quality.

9.4.2 Implications of the study

The proposed holistic framework provided vital implications for industry practitioners in the TO industry.

Firstly, the ITO through the suggested framework measured service quality to identify potential weaknesses and develop improvement strategies [employees' development and crisis management, affiliation to ISO and use of ICT] for better service quality. This kind of SWOT analysis was necessary for any ITO and even tourism business as it kept in view any shortfalls that may show up while maintaining the vision of the company.

Secondly, the ITO through this framework identified potential and serious partners with whom they could enter into performance-based contracts in line with the objectives, strategic management and vision of the organisation. This strategic move sets the tone for healthy competition among competitors in the TO industry.

Thirdly, the outcome of the service quality evaluation framework was to bring about more satisfied and happy customers. The spill over effect for the ITO increased revenue, boosted corporate image, higher visibility, improved ranking when searched in search engines and more referrals from customers

With the implementation of the service quality evaluation framework, TO managers and employees understood that building a service quality culture instiled in ITO staff the ethics and deontology of service quality excellence through the establishment of a strategic orientation policy. This orientation became a blue print of the organisation's vision stipulating what theoretically must exist. Management must ensure all ITO staff stick to the guidelines of the blue print so as to assure the delivery of good service quality.

In ITOs, marketing is key to its development and eventual success, and should be customer-centric, yet service-centric as proposed by the service quality path model. Through the right marketing research orientation, the ITO understood the current marketing trends, obtained relevant information concerning competitors and comprehend the ever-changing customer preferences.

TO and even tourism organisations must consider if not now, in the not too distant future the topic of quality management via adherence to the ISO 9000. ISO 9000 on quality management layed the ground rules for service quality standards which were modified to meet the specificities of the TO industry. This would greatly support marketing efforts, improve service quality of the organisation and more so, help in gaining international recognition.

The findings of this empirical study revealed an existing gap in the customer perception and expectation values. This meant that ITO managers, employees and especially marketers, through the implementation of the service quality path model, obtained valuable customer data that was used to reduce the present service quality gap.

The management of ITO and even other tourism organisations should invest on managers and employees training to provide them with the right skills set. ITO staff hold the reputation of the organisation whose values must be translated and reflected in their daily work attitudes and behaviour. Training would also serve as a motivating factor towards more commitment at work and career growth.

Tourism organisations should conduct regular service quality evaluations not only for the customer but also considering the other stakeholders in the industry. This will help reduce the gap between the customer’s expectation and the staff (managers and employees) level of understanding of the customer needs. This scenario provided a global picture of the problem at hand so appropriate actions were taken to resolve the issue.

9.4.3 Limitations of the study

The findings of this research were subjected to the following limitations.

9.4.3.1 Lack of an appropriate sampling frame

In this study, the original quantitative sample frame expected was n=300 which composed of three participating groups in the online survey as follows [customers (n=150), managers (n=75) and employees (n=75)]. The non-probability approach used was the purposive sampling technique to collect data. This technique somehow reduced the generalisability of the empirical findings.

At the end of the data collection phase, there was a total of 126 customer respondents (n=126); 13 manager respondents (n=13) and five employee respondents (n=5). For the data analysis phase, only the customer and manager data sets were analysed while owing to the very small sample population of the employees, this group of respondents was not analysed as the sample size was considered non-significant and not representative.

Another limitation was that this study was conducted only in one country, that is, Cameroon. It was better to consider a wider scope when it came to doctoral studies because the findings were more representative and reflective of the sample population. However, this was because of the COVID-19 pandemic which hit the world and specially the tourism industry. The travel restrictions imposed very limited movements.

9.4.3.2 Lack of an appropriate survey responses

This study applied a web-based survey in the collection of primary quantitative data. Despite the wide and repeated reminders to participants over different media such as email, phone calls, short messages, WhatsApp and LinkedIn, many respondents still did not send in their feedback.

9.4.3.3 Time and budget constraints

Owing to the lockdown implemented in Cameroon like most other countries around the world, many participants had to manage their little finances and time on internet bills. To them it was not very necessary spending time and money. So despite the repeated reminders to take up the survey, completing the survey was not a top priority to some of the respondents.

9.5 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future studies could apply other research approaches or sampling techniques to obtain a much appropriate and representative sample frame whose findings could be generalised. Similar studies replicated and tested in other countries to prove or disprove the findings of this research concerning service quality assessment. This would help to give credibility, reliability and a more generalised appraisal of the findings of the research.

Future research could apply other primary data collection techniques which are more motivating, effective and appropriate that challenge the scientific validity of the current methodology to bring about the improved results. Researchers could opt for more statistical and analytical data training at an early stage of the studies so that before embarking on data collection, he/she/they must have ample knowledge on the most appropriate techniques applicable to the study.

Future studies should always envisage, anticipate and accord more time to the data collection process to compensate for the time constraints encountered. Non-financial motivational techniques / approaches could be proposed to participants in the study, if it is allowed by the university ethics policy that do not jeopardise the integrity of the institution.

9.6 CONCLUSION

"Wow, your service is exceptional" gives a sense of pride and satisfaction for a service well performed. Receiving such heartwarming comments from your customers is so fulfilling. That is what good service quality delivered brings to the ITO or any service oriented establishment. For this to happen, according to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, 3 and 4 in this study, themes such as service culture, service encounter, customer experience and satisfaction, quality service are important elements needed to be pulled together to understand the field of service quality assessment. Given the present dispensation, it is no doubt that service quality assessment brings about improved service quality, more satisfied customers and increased revenue.

The aim of this study was to empirically conceptualise a service quality assessment model for the ITO industry in Cameroon. In Part 1 of this study, the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, 3 and 4 brought in all supporting facts and evidence to support and contrast the objectives of this study. Part 2 in chapter 5 presented the conceptual framework and the operational framework of this study. Part 3 chapter 6 tested and validated the proposed framework. The chapter discussed the operationalised methodology applied included a sequential exploratory mixed method comprising quantitative (online survey questionnaire) and qualitative (in-depth semi-structured interviews). The results from the quantitative phase were used to prepare and fine tune the interview guide used during the qualitative phase. The results of the quantitative phase and findings from the qualitative phase, were both analysed using SPSS version 26, triangulated, integrated and reported in chapter 7 and chapter 8 respectively. Part 4 discussed the findings of the empirical analysis, conclusions and presented recommendations based on the findings.

The quantitative data analysis comprised descriptive statistics of biographic information of both the customer [n=126] and manager [n=12] questionnaires sampled. Owing to the very small sample size of employees' responses collected [n=5], the data could not be analysed. These independent latent constructs used in this study were operationalised using the following different indicators: empathy [hospitality; value for money], assurance [safety and security; tour quality], responsiveness [ability to resolve problems; use of technology; time management], reliability [price; communication and information] and tangibility [hygiene and sanitation; logistics and amenities]. The findings of the empirical analysis showed that service perception [P = 3.81] and the service expectation [E = 4.46] therefore, the service quality perception value was lower than service expectation producing a low service quality evaluation score [Q = -0.65]. The test for validity and reliability measurement was carried out using Cronbach's alpha which in this study, was confirmed to be reliable (values above 0.7) for all the latent constructs. Pearson moment correlation [inferential analysis] was used to test the research hypotheses for customer respondents whose findings rejected the null hypotheses and concluded that a significant relationship existed between the independent and dependent latent constructs. For manager respondents, Kendall correlation [Inferential analysis] was used to test the hypothesis. The findings declined to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was an insignificant statistical evidence to suggest that the independent constructs have a positive significant relationship with the dependent latent construct. From the findings from the quantitative data analysis, there was poor service quality delivered to customers. This study recommended that ITOs need to improve their service quality delivery by implementing strategies such as adhering to the ISO 9000 (quality standards), risk management, recovery from service failure and conducting regular marker research. Another recommendation is that ITO managers must focus on customer needs and put their interest first before any other.

The proposed assessment model called the service quality path model for ITO service quality in Cameroon showed very interesting trends as ITO experts in this study opined that certain factors must be put together in developing an effective service quality evaluation framework: ethics and guidelines; customers' feedback and review; technology; customers focused guidelines; benchmark analysis; market competiveness; logistic and hygiene and sanitation. In this model of service quality evaluation framework based on TO experts' opinions, it was observed that service quality determinants, drivers and components influenced the kind of service quality activities to be implemented. This study identified three levels of outcomes including positive service quality outcome, indifferent service quality outcome and negative service quality outcome. The model proposed that both customer-centric and service-centric outcomes must be combined to achieve full service quality objectives. The resulting effect of the service quality objective was to attain the zone of satisfaction because in the zone of satisfaction, both the customers and the ITO benefit from the service quality system. Customers are satisfied with the service quality rendered and the ITO benefits from the growth in market share and goodwill.

The completeness of the research findings were not satisfactory as hoped at the start of the study because the employee data was too small that they were not analysed. Nevertheless, it was concluded that this study's contributions is double fold: theoretical / academics and practical / managerial.

Theoretical contribution: A conceptual framework for the ITO industry in Cameroon was developed based on past studies presented in the review of literature in this study. Internationally recognised theories such as SERVQUAL model and the TO service quality model were adapted and applied in this study to develop the service quality path model as a service quality evaluation framework for ITO industry in Cameroon. The conceptual framework contributes to the body of knowledge in the stream service quality.

Managerial contribution: Based on the information obtained from the theoretical contributions, an operational framework was proposed for this study which explained the practical functionalities and application within an organisational setting. This framework was developed to promote leadership through the vision and strategic management of the organisation in which the service culture was implemented from the top; everyone was aware of the importance of service quality in the organisation and all stakeholder views were considered before decisions were taken. This was asserted by Goetsch and Davis (2014) who posited that service quality emerged as an impetus to managerial strength and competitiveness.

All this knowledge culminated in giving the ITO comparative advantage to stand high in the market, increase sales, win potential customers and maintain even the present customers, grow your profit level and stay in the zone of satisfied customer. Within the ambit of this thesis, insight was obtained from literature concerning service quality evaluation within the context of the ITO. This enabled recommendations to be fashioned to resolve the research problem identified in this study which was poor service quality. Undertaking this study, the researcher benefited from necessary skills required to complete this study and the ability to probe important research areas that finally contributed to the stream of service quality assessment.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: UNISA ETHICS CLEARANCE LETTER

UNISA university of south africa

UNISA DEPARTMENT APPLIED MANAGEMENT RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE (DAM-RERC)

Date: 13 March 2020

ERC Reference # : 2019_CEMS_DAM_020
Name: Mr. Eyong Ayuk Ako-Ebot
Student #: 57362866

Dear Mr Eyong Ayuk Ako-Ebot

Decision: Ethics Approval from March 2020 to March 2023

Researcher(s): Eyong Ayuk Ako-Ebot
+237 677196282 / +237 681343664 / 57362866@mylife.unisa.ac.za / ayukpapa2011@gmail.com

Supervisor (s): Prof Marios Sotiriadis
+27(012)433-4699 / sotermarios@gmail.com
Prof Cina van Zyl
+27(012)429-6632 / vzylc@unisa.ac.za

Working title of research:
ITOSQUAL: A Holistic Evaluation Framework For Inbound Tour Operator Service Quality

Qualification: Doctor of Philosophy in Management Studies (Tourism)

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa DAM Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for three years.

*The **low risk application** was **reviewed** by the DAM Ethics Review Committee in March 2019 in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment. The decision was approved on the 13th of March 2020.*

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to the relevant guidelines set out in the Unisa Covid-19 position statement on research ethics attached.

University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
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APPENDIX B: RESEARCH AUTHORISATION MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND LEISURE, CAMEROON

REPUBLIQUE DU CAMEROUN
Paix – Travail – Patrie

MINISTERE DU TOURISME ET DES LOISIRS

SECRETARIAT GENERAL

CENTRE DE DOCUMENTATION ET DES ARCHIVES

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REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON
Peace – Work – Fatherland

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N° 0020 /L/MINTOUL/SG/CDA/SB
Réf. : N°3019A/84623 du 23 déc. 2019

Yaoundé, le 23 JAN 2020

LE MINISTRE D'ETAT,

A

Monsieur EYONG AYUK AKO-EBOT,
Etudiant en doctorat à l'Université d'Afrique du Sud
Tél. : 677196282 / 677003685

Objet : Demande d'autorisation de recherche.

Faisant suite à votre correspondance de référence,

J'ai l'honneur de vous faire connaître que je marque mon accord pour l'accès à la documentation et les entrevues sollicitées.

A cet effet, vous êtes prié de bien vouloir prendre l'attache du Centre de Documentation et des Archives (porte R01), munie de la présente correspondance.

Veuillez croire Monsieur, à l'assurance de ma considération distinguée.

Pour le Ministre d'Etat
et Par Délégation
Le Secrétaire Général

Angeline Florence Ngomo

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN AN ACADEMIC RESEARCH

Consent for participation in an academic research
Department of Transport Economics, Logistics and Tourism

A Holistic Evaluation Framework for Inbound Tour Operator Service Quality in Cameroon.

Research conducted by:
Eyong Ayuk Ako-Ebot
Email : 57362866@unisa.ac.za

Dear respondent

You are invited to participate in an academic research conducted by Eyong Ayuk Ako-Ebot (Student from the Department of Transport Economics, Logistics and Tourism) at the University of South Africa. The purpose of this research is to model an effective and efficient service quality evaluation framework for the inbound tour operator within the context of the Cameroon tour operator industry.

Please note the following:

- You were selected to participate in the study as you are considered as a tour operator manager, employee or customer operating or residing in Yaoundé or Douala, Cameroon.
- This study involves an **anonymous** web-based survey. Your name will not appear on the questionnaire and the answers you give will be treated as strictly **confidential.**
- Your participation in this study is very important to the researcher. You may, however, choose not to participate and you may also stop participating at any time without any negative consequences.
- Your participation is voluntary and there is no penalty or loss of benefit for non-participation.
- Please answer the questions in the attached questionnaire as completely and honestly as possible. This should not take more than **10 minutes** of your time.
- In completing the questionnaire, you are assisting the researcher to model an effective and efficient service quality evaluation framework for the inbound tour operator in Cameroon.
- The results of this study will be used for academic purposes only.
- The research was approved by the Ethical Clearance Committee at UNISA.
- Electronic copies of your responses will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years on a password protected computer, thereafter it will be deleted.
- If you would like to be informed of the final research findings or require any further information, please feel free to contact the researcher.

You also agree to the following:

- You have read and understood the information provided above.

- You have sufficient opportunity and contact details of researchers available to ask questions, if the need arises.
- You give your consent to participate in the study on a voluntary basis.
- You are aware that the findings of this study will be anonymously processed into the research report, a journal publication and/or a conference proceeding.
- You agree to the recording of your responses in a numeric data set.

Please make an X in the following box to indicate that you agree to participate in this study:

I agree to participate in this study:	

APPENDIX D: COVER LETTER TO A WEB-BASED SURVEY

Ethical clearance #: 2019_CEMS_DAM_020

COVER LETTER TO AN ONLINE ANONYMOUS WEB-BASED SURVEY

Dear Prospective participant,

You are invited to participate in a survey conducted by EYONG AYUK AKO-EBOT under the supervision of Professor MARIOS SOTIRIADIS and Professor Cina Van Zyl, professors in the Department of Applied Management towards a PhD in management studies at the University of South Africa.

The survey you have received was designed to develop a holistic service quality evaluation framework for the inbound tour operator in Cameroon. You were selected to participate in this survey because you own, work or use the services of an inbound tour operator company operating for more than two [2] years. You are not eligible to complete this survey if you are younger than 18 years and have not worked for up to two [2] years. By completing this survey, you agree that the information you provide may be used for research purposes, including dissemination through peer-reviewed publications and conference proceedings.

It is anticipated that the information we gain from this survey will help us to model an assessment framework for inbound tour operators in Cameroon. You are, however, under no obligation to complete the survey and you can withdraw from the study prior to submitting the survey. The survey is developed to be anonymous, meaning that we will have no way of connecting the information that you provide to you personally. Consequently, you will not be able to withdraw from the study once you have clicked the submit button based on the anonymous nature of the survey. If you choose to participate in this survey it will take up no more than ten [10] minutes of your time. You will not benefit from your participation as an individual, however, it is envisioned that the findings of this study will be presented as a conference paper, included in the conference proceedings and or published in a journal article. We do not foresee that you will experience any negative consequences by completing the survey. The researcher undertakes to keep any information provided herein confidential, not to let it out of our possession and to report on the findings from the perspective of the participating group and not from the perspective of an individual.

The records will be kept for five years for audit purposes where after it will be permanently destroyed, electronic versions will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer. You will not be reimbursed or receive any incentives for your participation in the survey.

The research was reviewed and approved by the UNISA-DAMS Research Ethics Review Committee. The primary researcher, EYONG AYUK AKO-EBOT can be contacted during office hours at 57362866@mylife.unisa.ac.za.The study leader, EYONG AYUK AKO-EBOT can be contacted during office hours at (+237) 677196282. Should you have any questions regarding the ethical aspects of the study, you can contact the research ethics office at (012) 429 4166 or uysm@unisa.ac.za. Alternatively, you can report any serious unethical behaviour at the University's Toll Free Hotline 0800 86 96 93.

ANNEXURE E: CUSTOMER QUESTIONNAIRE

Respondent number | | | |

A Holistic Evaluation Framework for Inbound Tour Operator Service Quality in Cameroon.

Dear respondent

Thank you for your time and willingness to complete the following questionnaire. There are no right or wrong answers; we are merely interested in your personal opinion regarding the subject matter.

SECTION I

1. What is your Gender
   - ◯ Male
   - ◯ Female

2. What is your age range
   - ◯ 18- 20 years
   - ◯ 21-30 years
   - ◯ 31-40 years
   - ◯ 41-50 years
   - ◯ 51-65 years

3. How long have you been using ITO services
   - ◯ Less than 2 years
   - ◯ More than 2 years

SECTION II

4. How would you rate the following tour operator service quality variables (1=least important; 5=most important)

	1	2	3	4	5
Hospitality	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Value for money	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Safety and security	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
tour quality	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Ability to resolve problems	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Use of technology	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Time management	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Price	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Communication and information	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Hygeine and sanitation	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Logistics and amenities	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Other variable(s) not listed

5. Customer Expectations of Service Quality from the Inbound Tour Operator (ITO).
Complete the service quality expectations from the ITO using the statements below (what you expect from the ITO)

Rate the following expectations in accordance to how important they are to you using the scale provided: 1= strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neutral; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I expect the ITO to have modern service equipment	○	○	○	○	○
I expect the ITO to have clean furniture	○	○	○	○	○
I expect the ITO employees to have a neat appearance	○	○	○	○	○
I expect the ITO to have a sincere interest in solving customer's problems	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I expect the ITO to deliver the services right the first time to customers	○	○	○	○	○
I expect the ITO to deliver the services to customers in time	○	○	○	○	○
I expect the ITO to provide customers with the correct bill	○	○	○	○	○
I expect the ITO employees to offer reliable services	○	○	○	○	○
I expect the ITO employees to give quick service	○	○	○	○	○
I expect the ITO employees will greet and welcome customers in a friendly manner	○	○	○	○	○
I expect the ITO employees" Behavior to instill confidence in customers about the employees	○	○	○	○	○
I expect the ITO to be trustworthy	○	○	○	○	○
I expect the ITO employees will give customers special attention	○	○	○	○	○
I expect the ITO will give customers individualized attention	○	○	○	○	○

6. Evaluate the service quality perceived by the ITO to you (your experiences of the service) using the statements below

Rate the following perceptions in accordance to how important they are to you using the scale provided: 1= strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neutral; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The ITO has modern service equipment	○	○	○	○	○
The ITO has clean furniture	○	○	○	○	○
The ITO has neat appearing employees	○	○	○	○	○
The ITO has a sincere interest in solving customer's problems	○	○	○	○	○
The ITO delivers the services right the first time to customers	○	○	○	○	○
The ITO delivers the services to customers in time	○	○	○	○	○
The ITO provides customers with the correct bill	○	○	○	○	○
The ITO employees offer reliable services	○	○	○	○	○
The ITO employees give quick service	○	○	○	○	○
The ITO employees greet and welcome customers in a friendly manner	○	○	○	○	○
The ITO employees' behavior instills confidence in customers about the employees	○	○	○	○	○
The ITO is trustworthy	○	○	○	○	○
The ITO employees give customers special attention	○	○	○	○	○
The ITO give customers individualized attention	○	○	○	○	○

Other experiences not mentioned above?

7. In your opinion which aspect(s) of service quality needs improvement.

	Agree	Disagree
Conduct market analysis periodically	○	○
Ability to respond quickly when a problem arises from a failed service	○	○
Train personnels on skills that enhance service quality	○	○
Strengthen human and capital resources management	○	○
Focus on the service quality dimensions (Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy, Reliable, Tangible)	○	○

Other (please specify)

Thank you for your time and consideration

ANNEXURE F: MANAGER QUESTIONNAIRE

Respondent number

A Holistic Evaluation Framework for Inbound Tour Operator Service Quality in Cameroon.

Dear respondent

Thank you for your time and willingness to complete the following questionnaire. There are no right or wrong answers; we are merely interested in your personal opinion regarding the subject matter.

Section I

1. What is your Gender

- ◯ Male
- ◯ Female

2. What is your age range

- ◯ 18- 20 years
- ◯ 21-30 years
- ◯ 31-41 years
- ◯ 41-50 years
- ◯ 51-65 years

Section II

3. What do you understand by service quality

4. How would you rate the following tour operator service quality variables (1=least important; 5=most important)

	1	2	3	4	5
Hospitality	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Value for money	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Safety and security	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
tour quality	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Ability to resolve problems	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Use of technology	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Time management	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Price	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Communication and information	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Hygeine and sanitation	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Logistics and amenities	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Other variable(s) not listed

5. What do you understand by service quality evaluation and how do you conduct such evaluation in your organisation

6. In your opinion which aspect(s) of service quality needs improvement. Answer Yes or No

	Agree	Disagree
Conduct market analysis periodically	○	○
Ability to respond quickly when a problem arises from a failed service	○	○
Train personnels on skills that enhance service quality	○	○
Strengthen human and capital resources management	○	○
Focus on the service quality dimensions (Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy, Reliable, Tangible)	○	○

Other (please specify)

7. In your opinion, do you agree/disagree to the following statement. Answer by ticking Yes or No

	Yes	No
Do you provide employees with the resources they need to provide excellent service quality	○	○
Do you consider **always** the customer needs when providing a service	○	○
Do you train personnel on skills that enhance service quality	○	○
Do you research the market to obtain information that would improve the service offered	○	○
Do you communicate appropriately with customers	○	○
Are you responsive to customers complaints	○	○

Other Comments

Thank you for your time and consideration

ANNEXURE G: EMPLOYEE QUESTIONNAIRE

Respondent number

A Holistic Evaluation Framework for Inbound Tour Operator Service Quality in Cameroon.

Dear respondent

Thank you for your time and willingness to complete the following questionnaire. There are no right or wrong answers; we are merely interested in your personal opinion regarding the subject matter.

Section I

1. What is your gender?

◯ Male

◯ Female

2. What is your age range?

◯ 18- 20 years

◯ 21-30 years

◯ 31-42 years

◯ 41-50 years

◯ 51-65 years

Section II

3. What do you understand by service quality?

4. How long have you been employed with this ITO?

◯ Less than 2 years

◯ More than 2 years

5. How would you rate the following tour operator service quality variables (1=least important; 5=most important)

	1	2	3	4	5
Hospitality	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Value for money	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Safety and security	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Tour quality	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Ability to resolve problems promptly	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Use of technology	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Time management	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Price	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Communication and information	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Hygeine and sanitation	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Logistics and amenities	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

6. In your opinion, do you agree/disagree to the statement?

	Agree	Disagree
Conduct market analysis periodically	◯	◯
Ability to respond quickly when a problem arises from a failed service	◯	◯
Train personnels on skills that enhance service quality	◯	◯
Strengthen human and capital resources management	◯	◯
Focus on the service quality dimensions (Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy, Reliable, Tangible)	◯	◯

Other (please specify)

7. In your opinion which aspect(s) of service quality needs improvement? Answer Yes or No.

	Yes	No
Do you provide employees with the resources they need to provide excellent service quality	◯	◯
Do you consider **always** the customer needs when providing a service	◯	◯
Do you train personnel on skills that enhance service quality	◯	◯
Do you research the market to obtain information that would improve the service offered	◯	◯
Do you communicate appropriately with customers	◯	◯
Are you responsive to customers complaints	◯	◯

Other Comments

Thank you for your time and consideration

APPENDIX H: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Respondent number

A Holistic Evaluation Framework for Inbound Tour Operator Service Quality in Cameroon.

Dear respondent

Your permission is requested to participate in this study entitled "A Holistic Evaluation Framework for Inbound Tour Operator Service Quality in Cameroon". The aim of this study is to elaborate and suggest a framework to evaluate the service quality in the inbound tour operator industry especially considering the African context. The data you provide will be used to achieve the aim hence your contribution is highly valued and appreciated.

This interview guide forms part of the qualitative phase of this study and is to be answered by professionals/ experts in the tourism industry with five (5) years and above experience. Your participation will be treated with anonymity meaning there will be no use of actual names, utmost confidentiality will be exercised, and should you wish to withdraw from participating you are allowed to do so. Your participation in this interview is voluntary and will last about 15 minutes.

Your consent of participating in this survey will be evidenced by you accepting the zoom meeting invitation. Kindly ensure you login with the correct code that will be provided at least five minutes before the start of the interview.

Thank you for your time and willingness to complete the following questionnaire. There are no right or wrong answers; we are merely interested in your personal opinion regarding the subject matter.

Section A

1. What is your Gender?

◯ Male

◯ Female

2. For how long have you been involved in the tourism industry?

◯ 5-10 years

◯ 10+ years

Section B

3. What is your definition of service quality?...
....

4. Do you agree or disagree that the following service quality factors (Hospitality, Value for money, Safety and security, tour quality, Ability to resolve Problems, Use of technology, Time management, Price, Communication and Information, Hygeine and sanitation, Logistics and amenities) help to evaluate service quality in the tour operator industry? ………
……………………………………………………………………

5. Are there some factors not listed above that you can think of? ………
……………………………………………………………………

6. Among these SQ factors listed above, which according to you are the most important and why?

……
……
……………………………

7. How do you evaluate quality service (service perception VS service expectation) in a TO company?
....
....

8. Can you think of any other factor not listed that could contribute to the evaluation of service quality?
....
....

9. From a tourism expert point of view, is it feasible and possible to suggest and elaborate a Service Quality evaluation framework for the tour operator industry?
……
…………………………………………………………………

10. What can you say about quality management within Tour Operators?
……
……………………………………………………………………

11. What according to you are some of the areas of quality management (for example develop an ISO standardization particular to Tour Operators; effective service recovery mechanism; conduct market research; strengthen HR management and policies; focus on employee development) that help improve service quality?
....
....

Thank you for your time and consideration

APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW RESPONSE SHEET

A. Section 1: Demographic Data

Resp./Quest	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9	A10	
Q1	Male	Female	Male	Male	Male	Female	Male				
Q2	Since 1994 (27 years)	Since 2007 (14 years)	9 years	Since 2004 (17 years)	33 years	16 years	Since 2009 (12 years)				

B. Section 2: Core questions

Resp./Quest	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9	A10
Q3	SQ is the way a tourism agent makes a customer to feel happy to have consumed his services. Everything you can do to satisfy your customer	SQ for me primarily would have to do with how best we satisfy a customer's expectation. so much about **lean management**, how much we minimize waste of time, a waste of resources	SQ is how well clients are served with what was proposed. Their perceptions towards what was to be proposed to them. How do I perceive your offer, did you meet what you told me you were going to deliver.	SQ involves the way we offer services in relation to a particular service need. We talk of quality when we seek to attain a particular result.	SQ is the way customers perceive services that are being rendered to them to be able to say whether they are good or they are bad.	SQ is the evaluation between what one has in mind to do their perspective and the performance to really realize what you want to do.	SQ is providing acceptable services that match with the price. The service should be up to date and should reflect the price and delivered in a professional manner.			

Resp./Quest	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9	A10
Q4	**Agree** (hospitality, value for money, safety and security, tour quality, ability to resolve problems, use of	**Agree** (hospitality, value for money, safety and security, tour quality, ability to resolve problems, use of technology, time	**Agree** (hospitality, value for money, safety and security, tour quality, ability to resolve problems, use of	**Agree** (hospitality, value for money, safety and security, tour quality, ability to resolve problems, use of	**Agree** (hospitality, value for money, safety and security, tour quality, ability to resolve problems, use of	**Agree** (hospitality, value for money, safety and security, tour quality, ability to resolve problems, use of	**Agree** (hospitality, value for money, safety and security, tour quality, ability to resolve problems, use of			

	technology, time management, price, information & communication, Hygiene and sanitation, logistics and amenities	management, information & communication, Hygiene and sanitation, logistics and amenities. Honesty, quick response to requests **Disagree** price	technology, time management, price, information & communication, Hygiene and sanitation, logistics and amenities	technology, time management, price, information & communication, Hygiene and sanitation, logistics and amenities	technology, time management, price, information & communication, Hygiene and sanitation, **Disagree** logistics and amenities	technology, time management, price, information & communication, Hygiene and sanitation, logistics and amenities	technology, time management, price, information & communication, Hygiene and sanitation, logistics and amenities			

Resp./Quest	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9	A10
Q5	**Honesty, quick response to requests**.	**Leadership**. It is key and It's a whole process that drives the vision. **Client feedback** too is very important.	**Customer feedback**	I believe you have listed all the necessary factors.	**Customer -staff relationship**. When staff don't wear the customer oriented face and behaviour it impacts the level of SQ **Employee motivation** (financially or by job promotions etc) **Poor working conditions**	Almost all what you listed to me are important and vital	All were mentioned			

Resp./Quest	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9	A10
Q6	**Hospitality**, **safety and security** because in tourism activity people wish to be happy, safe	**Hospitality** ranks first for me. The way you receive a tourist is very important	**Safety and security** because no one wants to do tourism in an unsafe environment.	**Hospitality** remains determinant and eminent as the first contact always creates the first impression. Also **communication** is important. The right information must be provided for the customer to be knowledgeable.	**Price** is the most influential factor because if the price you pay for a package is good enough to cater for those who would be rendering you the service, that is already 80% assurance that you would get good services.	**Hospitality management.** It has 3 phases. The first is the preparation phase to receive the tourists. The second is **product management** and the third one is after the tour, you get the **customer feedback appraisal** from your customers.	**Transport and logistics** followed by **hygiene and sanitation** that is also very important. Then **Information and communication**			

Resp./Quest	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9	A10
Q7	The agent has to know the service expectations before offering a service.	The client's expectation is always key to understand clients	To me it's about trying your very best to meet my expectation. If the	I believe its all in relation to the objectives to be attained	Poor communication i would say is the greatest factor that causes variations in	With perception there is already an idea in mind so you what you are	There is a concept called **corporate image** in tourism. Usually			

		especially nowadays, they have all the crazy expectations of what a top-notch service is and then service perception would often come from the tour operator's angle. The best service quality is the kind of service that will bring referrals and repeat business is that which is geared towards satisfying the service expectation from the clients.	money I am paying for to get a particular service and if those services are given to me to my satisfaction I would judge that the service quality is good.	that a TO can be evaluated considerin g what was expected to be done and what effectively was done.	customer service expectation and delivery. There is a whole theory about customer expectation and service delivery. Before offering a service, the Tour operator should conduct a comparative study of services in the developed worlds compared to the developing world so that the appropriate services as per the customer is provided accordingly	giving to the customer. To know how to evaluate the customer you have to compare what you have in mind (perception) matches to what was done on the ground (expectation) to best tell.	what you see out of the field and what happens in the field matters. The way a product / service is packaged will determine the way a customer will see the product and that is where communicat ion is important.			

Resp./Quest	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9	A10
Q8	I think you have listed the most important	Apart from **leadership** which I have already mentioned, I think almost all the points have been touched.	Customer feedback and client reviews	I think almost all the points have been touched above.	Employee motivation	What you have said it almost covers everything.	Almost all have been listed			

Resp./Quest	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9	A 10
Q9	It's possible. Through a study conducted. There is an ethics guide for tourist guides which if followed there are high chances of success.	It's possible. And I would say it's been very important. the first thing that's coming to my mind is taking the client feedback. I mean, they should treat	Yes it's possible. The framework is all about a set of rules set that focuses on the clients.	Yes it's feasible and important. The framework serves as indicators and which tell us if what we are doing is well done. These are elements	Yes I would say yes it is possible to analyze a quality assessment framework Certain factors pertaining to SQ must be considered and you have to measure these factors to the real situation on the ground	Yes it is. Because you have to give something that best resembles a tour operator service	Yes it's very possible. One of the objectives of a framework is to keep a TO lofty and in the market and to measure strength with competitors. One of the things that will keep a TO up to date is technology and those lacking in			

		every feedback today. We have a lot of reviews online to know what the client's saying. get into every review, every feedback that you get from your clients and improve on service from that angle and also follow trends. Because we've discovered that most tour operators in Africa are still using the old ways So it's important that they upgrade in terms of technology.		that helps one analyse if effectively the services rendered to the customer is satisfied.	through a benchmark analysis. Also you have to understand what are the expectations of the customer? as customer expectations varies.		technology will eventually disappear. Logistics involves displacement which has to do with movement (ground transportation). the TO has to make sure the logistics are up to standard or match the price for that service. Equally hygiene and sanitation is also very important. Catering services must be sain for the customer to eat and not have any problems. All these things must be put under the framework of QS.			

Resp./Quest	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9	A10
Q10	QM according to me is not the most perfect point because most of the managers in the field of tourism don't really understand why they are there, they don't really care about the expectations of tourists, don't even understand how a tourism sector operates	QM for the most part has been neglected especially with tour operators that had frequent referrals and repeat businesses. Especially in Cameroon most of the tour operators that were there before, almost all are phasing	QM is all the care given to prospects and your clients. From front desk, to complaints handling how fast you respond to queries all those things go to enhance QM. Striving to answer as fast as possible to every requests with credible	In our context we have the problem of hospitality, communication and the non-respect of time frame during which a service is to be delivered. The timeframe englobes all these factors we have discussed above.	QM is a whole concept that has a lot of considering their industry specificatio ns. In the tour operator industry, every employee must master his/her function and role and also distinguish between the different	QM involves bringing together all the product components in order to make your product a realistic product. In order to have good service quality managemen t. You must have good personnel, evaluate your market, improve your technology,	QM is a pre-requisite for TO to stay lofty in the market and it should be encourage d. All TO should seriously consider upgrading their QM			

		out because they didn't deem it necessary to improve on their service quality. So yes I think it's important that that be reviewed.	information.		levels of management because communication is primordial.	be current with what is happening in the field if not you can phase out. Tourism is a day to day job and security is very important. You have to know the service you are selling so you feel confident selling it.				

Resp./Quest	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9	A10
Q11	All these areas listed are important to improve	I think employee development and HR very important. Like I said, everything to me really falls on leadership, and that's why I'm talking about the employees and the HR, because it takes a team to make a dream work but leadership comes first because everything rises and falls on leadership. So is quality management. Yes. So what I mean is tour operators should seize from just being managers to leaders.	I will emphasize on employee development because if they feel as if they belong to the company they will give their best in delivering services. To me if you have happy employees you would have happy clients.	I believe a serious study has to be conducted that will end up in policies and norms considering the factors discussed above. Without such a framework it will be difficult to evaluate SQ.	It is very good for tour operators to take into consideration the **ISO standardization.** In Cameroon there is ANOR that takes care of standardization. Its important to offer services of international standards so as to have a high SQ rating. Equally, **conducting market research** is vital to keep ahead of competitors. Trends are changing in the TO industry especially with the COVID-19 pandemic. There are now smaller group travels compared to larger groups in the past.	With the COVID 19 pandemic, we of the tourism domain have learned that we have to develop our internal tourism as there are less international travels. That is why the association of tour guides of Cameroon, we go down on the filed to sensitize the population on the importance of locally consuming our tourism potentials.	I think all the points cited are very important and none should be undermined			

					Lastly the r**elationship between the tour operator and its partners** involved in the service package matters a lot.					
General remarks /observations Regarding this interview	Wishes studies like this to not end up in drawers / cupboards. Studies should be made available to industry practitioners because it would be helpful.	The Covid 19 pandemic is real and So I think crisis management is important at this point. I would have expected maybe a question on how tour operators can thrive in a post COVID era. You talked about ICT, I think more has to be done on how fast tour operators leverage on an ICT's.	I wish you the best in your research and may the objectives set be met.	I encourage you in your studies as the questions are pertinent. My wish is at the end if we can have a sustainable framework for our sector that can help us succeed.	All players must be service oriented so that the final goal can be achieved		No further comments.			

APPENDIX J: LANGUAGE EDITING CERTIFICATE

EDITING AND PROOFREADING CERTIFICATE

7542 Galangal Street

Lotus Gardens

Pretoria

0008

25 February 2022

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This certificate serves to confirm that I have language edited Eyong Ayuk Ako-Ebot 's thesis entitled, **"A HOLISTIC EVALUATION FRAMEWORK FOR INBOUND TOUR OPERATOR SERVICE QUALITY IN CAMEROON."**

I found the work easy and intriguing to read. Much of my editing basically dealt with obstructionist technical aspects of language, which could have otherwise compromised smooth reading as well as the sense of the information being conveyed. I hope that the work will be found to be of an acceptable standard. I am a member of Professional Editors' Guild.

Hereunder are my contact details:

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