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Influence of socio-demographics of leisure travellers on service experience equity

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the influence of socio-demographic characteristics of domestic leisure travellers on evaluation of service experience equity in three hotels offering hedonic service in Kaduna city, Nigeria. Data for this research were obtained using 284 questionnaires, and the results of this research indicate a non-existence of an association between educational status and the dimensions of service experience equity while gender, age, marital status, type of occupation, and income level significantly affect at least one dimension in varying proportion. On the overall, income level of leisure travellers has the highest significant main effect on evaluation of service experience equity in the hotels. Moreover, higher income earners tend to show high expectation, and preference for quality, alluring hedonic service.

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Leisure travellers; service experience equity; hotels; Kaduna city

Introduction

Tourists out for business and pleasure in many destinations are often influenced by their socio-demographic characteristics which are evident in their behavioural tendencies such as motivation, destination choice, expenditure, destination image formation, length of stay, and service experience perception (Heung, Qu, & Chu, 2001; Lee & Chen, 2009; Mohsin, 2008; Otoo, Agyeiwaah, Dayour, & Wireko-Gyebi, 2016). While evidence abound of the established positive and negative relationship of socio-demographic characteristics and tourists behaviour, little is known in the literature of the causal link between socio-demographic features, and leisure travellers' perception of service experience equity in general, and hotels in particular.

The concept of service experience equity is based on Mascarenhas, Kesavan, and Bernacchi (2006) view point that total customer experience is a combination of functional and emotional demands. They noted that efforts made to understand customer perceived service experience have been more concentrated on only one aspect of customer service experience known as functional experience, without the integration of an important component of customer experience known as the emotional experience (a mix of excitement, entertainment and adventure) in the service encounter.

To incorporate the emotional appeals; termed hedonic services into the dimension of customer perceived service experience, Wong (2013) replaced value equity which Lemon, Rust, and Zeithaml

(2001) described as the customer's objective assessment of the utility of a brand based on perception of what is given and what is received with customer perceived service experience equity in Rust, Lemon, and Zeithaml (2004) framework. This is based on the position of Lorentzen and Hansen (2009) that it is more important than perceived value as a construct in influencing customer behaviour in tourism and hospitality industry.

As noted by Malone, McCabe, and Smith (2014) and Li, Lehto, and Wei (2014), emotional experience is considered as the principal component of hedonic experience, and plays a central role in tourists' satisfaction. It also contributes substantially and positively to psychological well-being (Chang, 2008; Han & Patterson, 2011), which often influence tourists loyalty to a place (Kralj & Solnet, 2010). Understanding tourist's emotional experience not only broadens the evaluation of tourist experience, and satisfaction, but also adds to the knowledge of tourist behaviour connected to their hedonic experience (Pearce, 2009).

According to Wong (2013), service experience equity has four dimensions which are: service environment, employee service, service convenience, and hedonic service. As a way of contributing to the existing tourism and hospitality literature, the main objective of this paper is to examine the effect of socio-demographic features of leisure travellers on their evaluation of the dimensions of service experience equity in hotels providing emotional service offerings to their guest in Kaduna metropolitan city in Nigeria. Other specific sub objectives are to identify the indicators of the dimensions of service experience equity through exploratory factor analysis, determine the association of gender, age, marital status, educational status, occupation level, and monthly income with the dimensions of service experience equity, and examine the variation in the main effect of gender, age, marital status, education level, and monthly income on service experience equity.

Literature review

Components of service experience equity

Service environment

As noted by Chang and Horng (2010), service environment provides customers with functional and emotional experience through their interaction with service encounter. Similarly, Patrício, Fisk, Falcão e Cunha, and Constantine (2011) noted that a magnificently built and organized service environment is fundamental to customer experience, as it delivers both physical and functional benefits to the customers. Service environment thus consist of all the tangible aspects of the servicescape such as architectural design, layout, interior decor, equipment, ambient conditions, space/function, and signs, symbols, and alluring artefacts (Bitner, 1992). According to Hightower, Brady, and Baker (2002), a customer reaction is a result of the interaction between the customer and servicescape. As such, the role of servicescape in the creation of customer experience cannot be overemphasized, as its impact significantly on customers' emotions and behaviours (Terblanche, 2009).

Employee service

Total customers' experience depends largely on the kind of interaction that occurs between them and employees, as the behaviour of employees affects their experience. Such experience comes with functional and emotional benefits, and as such, the nature of service rendered by employees should be appealing because they are an important element in the deliverance of a memorable customer experience in the service industry (Chang & Horng, 2010). Therefore, employees have the responsibility to behave emphatically, and respond nicely and politely to all customers' needs (Crosby & Johnson, 2007). For instance, addressing customers by their name, using respectful words, and greeting them warmly are ways to nurture customer experience, and get their loyalty. Mascarenhas et al. (2006) opined that engaging customers in the service delivery process could not only fulfil their social needs, but also help create a memorable experience, and hence, a sustainable customer loyalty.

Service convenience

Arguments about service convenience practices in the literature are divergent, and tend to overlap in terms of content, and terminology. However, Berry, Seiders, and Grewal (2002) classified service convenience into five forms which are: decision convenience, access convenience, transaction convenience, benefit convenience, and post-benefit convenience. They noted that when a consumer seeks a hotel, the five forms of service convenience will come into play during the acquisition, and consumption process. Regardless of other service offerings that customers may encounter in a hotel, the more they nicely experience service convenience, the stronger their satisfaction with the hotel.

Service convenience to customers connote the time and effort associated with the service acquisition, which matters in every context, and it is the reason the customer is interested in the service (Berry et al., 2002). It leads to customer satisfaction, and patronage behaviour (Seiders, Voss, Godfrey, & Grewal, 2007). Thus, a service provider that hopes to improve its level of customer-perceived service quality, and experience must provide service convenience to its customers (Berry et al., 2002; Liang & Wang, 2006). By understanding the types of convenience they can offer, businesses such as retailers can formulate convenience strategies that support lasting customer relationships, and raise their competitiveness to new levels (Seiders et al., 2007).

Hedonic service

Hedonic service gives emotional offerings to customers, and so service providers are encouraged to connect their business with fun giving activities that will positively move customers' emotion (Berry, 2001). Hedonic service provides customers a real emotional experience that could touch their heart (Berry, 2001; Mascarenhas et al., 2006), and they include fine dining, shopping, entertainments, theme parks which create pleasure, fun, and excitement (Bigné, Mattila, & Andreu, 2008). As such, total customer experience tends to be more fulfilling by a mix of offerings which provides excitement, entertainment, and adventure (Terblanche, 2009).

Effect of socio-demographic characteristics on service evaluation in the service industry

Aksoy, Atilgan, and Akinci (2003) noted that socio-demographic characteristics are one of the major determinants of consumer buying behaviour, and it plays a remarkable role in influencing customer needs, and service quality perception. This view point was further supported by Bekko (2000) who opined that the disparity in the socio-demographic features of consumers can lead to variances in their perception of service quality. To this end, Esu (2015) examined the influence attendees' socio-demographic characteristics have on perceived quality of the Calabar Festival in Nigeria, and attendees' occupation, educational status, and gender showed a significant influence on perceived festival quality.

Moreover, Ganesan-Lim, Russell-Bennett, and Dagger (2008) found that age was the significant factor in the perception of service quality of passenger transport services, but gender, and income were not found to be significant. Additionally, Moghadam, Khorshidi, Tabriz, and Menhaj (2014) noted that marital status, educational level, and occupation influenced service quality in an airline industry.

Effect of socio-demographic characteristics on tourists behaviour

A number of studies have looked into the causal relationship between socio-demographics and tourist's behaviour. Heung et al. (2001) research which was meant to understand Japanese leisure traveller's vacation motives, and effect of socio-demographic variables found that socio-demographic characteristics of age, gender, marital status, income, occupation, and length of stay are significantly associated with four out of the five vacation factors. Similarly, Mohsin (2008) investigated the impact of socio-demographic variables of Mainland Chinese holidaymakers on their travel motivation and

attractiveness. The results revealed that marital status, gender, age, and income are effective predictors of respondents' destination and holiday preferences.

Agrusa, Kim, and Wang (2011) explored the differences in attitudes and behavioural characteristics, and preferences of Chinese tourists in Hawaii according to key socio-demographic variables. The results of their study found socio-demographic variables to show significant differences in attitudinal and behavioural characteristics. Furthermore, volunteer tourists' length of stay was influenced by only place of origin, while a non-significant effect was found in age, sex, and marital status (Otoo et al., 2016). In another study, Lee and Chen (2009), opined that tourists' perceptions of service quality in hotels do not vary by occupation. Research has also shown that gender, level of education, religious affiliation, occupation, and income of hotel guests are significantly related to their overall perception of service quality (Hagan, 2015).

Essentially, Mohsin (2003) and Heung and Lam (2003) opined that socio-demographic variables not only affect tourist behaviour, but goes further to drive their complaint behaviour, and perception of service quality. Thus, understanding socio-demographic features of tourists provide veritable information pertinent to the management and promotion of a destination (Mohsin & Ryan, 2004). This point was buttressed by Huang and Xiao (2000) who suggested that such research is significant as it has the potential of extending the breadth of knowledge of tourism behaviour, and contributes to tourist's destination management and planning. The hallmark of their study found gender differentiation, income, and occupational composition to exert significant influence on behavioural patterns, and attraction preferences of leisure-based tourists to Changchun in China.

Methodology

Data for this research were collected from three (3) hotels in Kaduna city found to be the most popular ones providing emotional appeals to customers in northwestern Nigeria. These hotels are: NAF Club Hotel, Command Guest Inn, and Asaa Pyramid Hotel. The research used quantitative design approach, through a structured questionnaire that is divided into two important sections. The first section consists of questions on travellers' socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age, marital status, educational status, and income level, while the second part of the questionnaire is made up of five-point Likert scale questions ("1" strongly disagree, to "5" strongly agree) for service experience equity dimensions (constructs). The indicators used in measuring "service environment" and "employee service" constructs were adopted from the study of Hightower et al. (2002), "service convenient" construct indicators were adopted from Rust et al. (2004) study, and "hedonic service" construct indicators were adopted from Wong (2013) study. In all of these studies, the constructs exhibited strong discriminant, and convergent validity with acceptable cronbach alpha. Each of the construct was measured with six items.

Six hundred questionnaires were given out for administration in the three hotels, with each having 200 questionnaires. The questionnaires were given to leisure travellers' lodging in the hotels, who were conveniently selected. The researchers meet the travellers in each hotel when they were outside to listen to musical bands, and gave them questionnaires. Before questionnaires were given to respondents, they were asked if they travelled from another part of Nigeria to Kaduna city, and are in the hotels for leisure. Only those who said their presence is for leisure purpose were considered as samples. Some travellers filled the questionnaires on the spot, while many of them took the questionnaires away which were collected thereafter. The mobile numbers of respondents were collected for ease of retrieval of the questionnaires, and all of them were called a day after the questionnaires were given. Three weeks were used to administer and retrieve the questionnaires. In NAF Club Hotel, only 101 questionnaires were returned, while 92 and 91 filled questionnaires were collected from the Command Guest Inn, and Asaa Pyramid Hotel, respectively. A total number of 284 questionnaires were collected from the hotels, yielding a return rate of 47.33%.

Data analysis was carried with the aid of SPSS 22 where exploratory factor analysis, Pearson correlation, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with Scheffe Post Hoc analysis were conducted, to examine the

effect of socio-demographic variables on the dimensions of service experience equity. Prior to Pearson correlation, ANOVA analysis, the data were explored for reliability and validity using Cronbach alpha coefficients. Then, the mean of the items measuring each construct was also computed to obtain a single value that was used for subsequent analysis.

Results

Socio-demographic characteristics of leisure travellers

The result of this study indicates that the majority (57.0%) of the leisure travellers are males (see Table 1). Leisure travellers within the age bracket of 21–30 years dominate the sample, and represent 50% of the sample. This is followed by 26.4% of leisure travellers who are within the age bracket of 31–40 years, and the remaining 23.6% are under 20 years, and over 40 years.

Further result shows that 37.7% of the leisure travellers are married, 34.9% are single, 14.8% are divorced, and 12.7% are widowed. In terms of educational qualification of respondents, a significant number (209) equivalent to 73.6% possesses a tertiary institution certificate, and 23.6% are holders of a secondary school certificate. The result also shows that few (2.8%) leisure travellers are holders of a primary certificate. For the occupation of leisure travellers, those engaged in different businesses dominate the sample, and represent 37.7%, while the civil servants occupy 22.2%, 21.1% are students, and 19.6% are workers of private organizations. In terms of their monthly income, the result shows that 37.0% earned N120,000 and above, 27.5% earned N81,000 – N120,000 monthly, and the remaining 35.6% of leisure travellers earned less than N81,000.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of leisure travellers ($N = 284$).

S/no	Attribute	Frequency (%)
1	<i>Gender</i>	
	Male	162 (57.0%)
2	Female	122 (43.0%)
	<i>Age</i>	
	Under 20 years	22 (8.5%)
	21–30 years	142 (50.0%)
	31–40 years	75 (26.4%)
3	Over 40 years	43 (15.1%)
	<i>Marital status</i>	
	Single	99 (34.9%)
	Married	107 (37.7%)
4	Divorce	42 (14.8%)
	Widowed	36 (12.7%)
	<i>Educational status</i>	
5	Primary	8 (2.8%)
	Secondary	67 (23.6%)
	Tertiary	209 (73.6%)
6	<i>Occupation</i>	
	Student	60 (21.1%)
	Business	107 (37.7%)
	Civil servant	63 (22.2%)
	Private worker	54 (19.0%)
6	<i>Monthly income</i>	
	Below N41,000	42 (14.8%)
	N41,000–N80,000	59 (20.8%)
	N81,000–N120,000	78 (27.5%)
	N121,000 and above	105 (37.0)

Source: Authors Field Survey Analysis, 2016.

Effect of socio-demographic variables on service experience equity

Firstly, the result of the exploratory factor analysis shows that two items measuring service convenience were deleted owing to factor loadings less than the recommended value of .5 (see Table 2). The

Table 2. Factor analysis, latent constructs, items and statistics.

Latent construct	Items	Factor loading	Mean	SD	Cronbach alpha
Service environment	The hotel physical environment is appealing	.786	3.72	.817	.734
	The hotel has more than enough space for me to be comfortable	.719	3.63	.891	
	I think that this hotel physical environment is superior	.651	3.49	.826	
	The hotel has a pleasant smell	.650	3.77	.801	
	The style of the interior accessories of the hotel is fashionable	.612	3.98	.869	
	The material used inside the hotel are pleasing and of high quality	.508	3.59	.891	
Employee service	Employees of the hotel provide prompt service	.796	3.65	.738	.777
	Employees of the hotel serve me as a distinguish guest	.745	3.72	.848	
	Employees of the hotel are polite	.736	4.14	.726	
	Employees of the hotel can help solve problem quickly	.648	3.80	.789	
	Employees of the hotel can always satisfy personal demand of customers	.635	3.74	.878	
	Employees of the hotel have good service altitude	.562	3.93	.774	
Service convenience	It took minimal time to get the information needed to choose a hotel	.828	3.41	.854	.641
	It was easy for me to complete my room reservation	.724	3.81	.753	
	It was easy for me to use facilities in the room	.632	4.04	.763	
	The hotel resolved my problem quickly	.591	3.82	.829	
Hedonic	I enjoyed the entertainment provided by the musical band in this hotel	.721	3.69	.700	.693
	I enjoyed the live performance provided by the musical band in this hotel	.713	3.79	.746	
	I lodge in this hotel since I could have good feeling of traditional and modern musical band	.634	3.82	.835	
	Lodging in this hotel was fun and pleasant	.618	3.78	.670	
	Entertainment experience in this hotel was truly joyful	.555	3.85	.651	
	Overall, I enjoyed the entertainment atmosphere provided by this hotel	.538	4.06	.713	

Notes: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy = .89. $\chi^2 = 2110.332$, Bartlett's test of sphericity, $p < .001$.

reliability test revealed that the scaled items have Cronbach alpha coefficients ranging from .641 to .777 (see Table 2), which signifies that indicators of the dimensions of service experience equity reliably provide a good measure of the constructs, and the values are above the recommended value of .6 minimum as suggested by Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, and Taham (2006). In addition, Levene's test of homogeneity of variance was conducted, and the result had a significant value of .364 which is greater than .05, and thus the data were considered suitable for ANOVA (Pallant, 2005).

In terms of the effect of gender on the four dimensions of service experience equity, no relationship exists ($p > .05$) (see Table 3). The finding did not show any positive or negative significant correlation between gender and service experience equity dimensions (constructs). The result also indicates that there is no correlation between age of leisure travellers and service experience equity constructs ($p > .05$). Nonetheless, the ANOVA test signifies that a significant main effect of age on

Table 3. Correlation between leisure travellers' socio-demographic characteristic and service experience equity dimensions.

Socio-demographic characteristics	Service environment	Employee service	Service convenience	Hedonic service
Gender	-.055	-.099	.056	-.003
Age	-.105	.036	.042	-.075
Marital status	.042	-.127*	.043	.195**
Educational level	-.050	-.042	-.025	-.012
Occupation	-.096	.024	.196**	.151*
Income level	.164**	.271**	.317**	.144*

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 4. ANOVA results of main effects of leisure travellers' socio-demographic characteristic on service experience equity dimensions.

Socio-demographic characteristics	Service environment (<i>f</i> ratio and sig)	Employee service (<i>f</i> ratio and sig)	Service convenience (<i>f</i> ratio and sig)	Hedonic service (<i>f</i> ratio and sig)
Gender	.87 (.353)	2.82 (.094)	.88 (.349)	.00 (.960)
Age	2.96 (.033)*	2.98 (.032)*	2.17 (.092)	1.90 (.129)
Marital status	3.92 (.009)**	4.22 (.006)**	3.32 (.020)*	6.19 (.000)
Educational level	1.61 (.201)	.35 (.705)	.56 (.573)	1.36 (.258)
Occupation	1.52 (.210)	.13 (.940)	5.12 (.002)**	2.20 (.088)
Income level	10.68 (.000)***	13.93 (.000)***	19.35 (.000)***	6.82 (.000)***

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

“service environment” ($f = 2.961$, $p < .05$) only was found, and the Scheffe Post Hoc test shows that the difference does not vary across age groups.

Research finding shows non-existence of correlation between marital status of leisure travellers with “service environment” and “service convenience” dimensions ($p > .05$), but a significant negative correlation was found with “employee service” dimension ($r = -.127$, $p < .05$), and a highly significant positive linear relationship exist with “hedonic service” dimension ($r = .195$, $p < .01$). An ANOVA test revealed a significant main effect of leisure travellers' marital status on all the dimensions of service experience equity. In this case, “service environment” has an f value of 3.916 and $p < .01$, “employee service” has an f value of 4.221 and $p < .01$, while the f and p value of “service convenience” is $f = 3.320$ and $p < .05$. In all, “hedonic service” indicated the highest difference between groups based on marital status with a highly significant f value of 6.188 and $p < .001$.

Furthermore, Scheffe Post Hoc test results revealed that for “service environment” dimension, the inter-group difference where significant when comparing “single” to “married” ($p < .05$) only. For “employee service” dimension, significant difference was observed between “single” and “married” ($p < .05$), and “married” and “widow” ($p < .05$). In terms of “service convenience” inter-group significant difference was found between “married” and “divorce” leisure travellers ($p < .05$). Additionally, a highly significant difference was found between “single” and “widowed” ($p < .01$), “married” and “widowed” (mean difference = $-.315$; $p < .01$), and “divorced” and “widowed” ($p < .01$). The disparity in “hedonic service” based on marital status is accounted for by the remarkable statistical significant difference in the perception of single and widowed ($p < .001$), married and widowed ($p < .01$), and also divorced and widowed ($p < .01$).

Study results did not show any correlation relationship between educational status of leisure travellers, and their evaluation of service experience equity, as all the p values are greater than .05. The finding of the correlation of occupational status with service experience equity revealed that only “service convenience”, and “hedonic service” dimensions showed a very highly significant relationship ($r = .196$; $p < .01$, and $r = .151$; $p < .05$), respectively. Further analysis using ANOVA signifies a highly significant difference between students and workers of private organizations ($p < .01$), and also between those engaged in businesses and workers of private organizations ($p < .01$).

Interestingly, income level of leisure travellers is the only socio-demographic characteristics that indicate highly positive correlation with all the dimensions of service experience equity. This signifies that income status has a significant relationship with “service environment” ($r = .164; p < .01$), “employee service” ($r = .271; p < .01$), “service convenience” ($r = .317; p < .01$), and “hedonic service” ($r = .144; p < .05$). Also, ANOVA (see Table 4) test shows a significant main effect on “service environment” ($f = 10.682; p < .001$), “employee service” ($f = 13.934; p < .001$), “service convenience” ($f = 19.352; p < .001$), and “hedonic service” ($f = 6.822; p < .001$). In order to ascertain how leisure travellers’ evaluation of service experience equity differ across income levels, a Scheffe Post Hoc test conducted indicates that leisure travellers whose monthly income is below N40,000 differ significantly with those whose monthly income is N41,000–N80,000, and above N121,000 ($p < .05$ and $p < .01$), respectively, for “service environment” dimension. Those whose income level falls in the category of N41,000–N80,000 differ significantly with leisure travellers who earns N81,000–N120,000 monthly (mean difference = .325; $p < .01$). In addition, a highly significant difference was also found between those who earn N81,000–N120,000 and above N121,000 monthly ($p < .001$).

For “employee service”, Scheffe Post Hoc test shows significant difference when comparing income earners who receives below N41,000 monthly and above N121,000 ($p < .01$), and also when comparing leisure travellers who earns N41,000–N80,000 and above N121,000 ($p < .001$). It was also evident that those who earned N80,000–N120,000 show significant difference with travellers whose monthly income is above N121,000. Scheffe Post Hoc test for “service convenience” dimension indicates highly significant difference between those who earned below N41,000 and above N121,000 ($p < .001$) monthly. Such significant difference was also observed when those who earn N81,000–N120,000 and above N121,000 are compared. Lastly, Scheffe Post Hoc test for “hedonic service” indicate that leisure travellers who earn below N41,000 differ significantly with those who earn N41,000–N80,000 monthly ($p < .05$). Findings also indicate that significant difference was found between those who earn N41,000–N80,000 and N81,000–N120,000, and also above N121,000 ($p < .01$ and $p < .001$), respectively.

Conclusion and implications

This study investigated the influence of some socio-demographic features on leisure travellers’ evaluation of service experience equity in hotels in Kaduna, Nigeria, having established that this particular causal relationship have been understudied in developed and developing countries in particular. In the first place, gender of leisure travellers was examined, and the finding did not indicate any relationship with the four dimensions of service experience equity. This implies that regardless of the gender of leisure travellers, their evaluation of service experience equity in hotels could either be positive or negative. For this study, the 3.59 least mean score of all the dimensions of service experience equity shows that leisure travellers rated service offerings in the three hotels well. By this result, both male and female travellers appreciate the functional and emotional appeals offered to them by the hotels very much. This finding is in agreement with previous studies such as the research of Otoo et al. (2016), Barquet, Brida, Osti, and Schubert (2011), Boman, Fredman, Lundmark, and Ericsson (2013), and contrary to the results of Oyewole (2013), Anderson (2011) and Zheng and Zhang (2013) in the tourism and hospitality industry.

Age was also not found to be a predictor of how leisure travellers assess service experience equity in hotels, except for the somewhat significant difference observed in the service environment dimension which is unclear and surprising. This finding suggests that even though leisure travellers’ socio-demographic of age did not show direct influence on service experience equity in the hotels, there seems to be some concern by different age groups on service environment offerings. In this case, different age group would have perceived service environment of the hotels with some disparity, however negligible. This finding is consistent with the result of Oyewole (2013) and Agrusa et al. (2011) research, and not in agreement with Heung and Zhu (2005) finding.

Although the result of the effect of marital status of leisure travellers did not signify any linear relationship with service environment and service convenience dimension, a significant negative association with employee service connotes an unfavourable perception of employee service across marital status, and a very significant positive relationship with hedonic service signifies a favourable assessment of hedonic service by leisure travellers. These findings imply that single, married, divorced, and widowed leisure travellers perceived employee service unfavourably differently, and have a strong affinity for hedonic service provided by the hotels, and some kind of commendation for the musical displays and other entertainment enjoyed. It is therefore necessary for hotel managers to ascertain the variation inherent in the hedonic dimension of service experience equity, for the purpose of providing unique entertainment tailored towards fulfilling the lodging desire of leisure travellers across marital status.

Furthermore, married leisure travellers tend to differ significantly with unmarried ones on service environment of the hotels. This could be unconnected to the notion that unmarried tourists are highly enthusiastic, and expects a very alluring exceptional attraction of a leisure environment than married ones. Married tourists are equally not very much concern about every detail in the environment of a hotel, as they are somehow occupied with a lot to think of given their status and enormous responsibility before them. This finding is consistent with the result of the study of Almeida-García, Pelaez-Fernandez, Balbuena-Vazquez, and Cortes-Macias (2016), Agrusa et al. (2011), and Heung and Zhu (2005).

Moreover, the reason for a significant difference observed between single and married, and married and widow for employee service and service convenience dimensions is not far from the fact that the needs and expectations of single, married, divorced, and widowed persons in the hotel industry is likely to differ. This connotes that what an unmarried person will ignore in terms of employee service and service convenience offerings in a hotel, may be the most desirable by married, divorced, and widowed persons and vice versa. More importantly, the hedonic service offering, which is the reason leisure travellers decided to lodge in the three hotels has shown to account for the most highly significant difference across leisure travellers' marital status. This provides meaningful implications for the hoteliers to take cognizance of, and it's vividly indicative of the substantial notable variation in the entertainment requirements of leisure travellers on marital status basis. In line with this finding, there is established evidence suggesting that individuals with different marital status differ in their evaluation of service offerings in the tourism and hospitality industry (Heung & Zhu, 2005).

The established positive association between leisure travellers' occupation type and service convenience and hedonic service, and the specific significant difference between students and workers in private organization and owners of businesses is not surprising. This is because the social and financial standing of students and workers differ, as such there is bound to be some level of disparity in the way service convenience and hedonic service provided by the hotels fascinates them. In this case, leisure travellers whose social class has heightened as a result of income they earn from their job will be more concerned about the quality of service convenience and hedonic service offered to them by the hotels than students who are most times of low financial status. This finding is in contrast with the result of Lee and Chen (2009).

Research finding which shows a strong positive relationship between income level and travellers' evaluation of service environment, service convenience, employee service, and hedonic service imply that as income of leisure travellers increases, the more positive is their assessment of the dimensions of service experience equity. In other words, leisure traveller's income affects their perception of service experience equity considerably in varying proportion. This result is supported by the finding of some studies in the tourism and hospitality industry (Fan, Qiu, Hsu, & George Liu, 2015; Inbakaran & Jackson, 2006; Sharma & Dyer, 2009). With higher income earners varying significantly from the low-income earners on hedonic service, it suggest that higher income leisure travellers have greater expectation and preference for high quality alluring entertainment of all kinds offered by hotel managers. Thus, hotel managers should provide hedonic service in a novel way that meets the needs and expectations of their customers.

Nigeria is a highly diversified country culturally and religiously, and therefore, firstly, conducting this study in northwestern Nigeria is one limitation, and the focus on domestic leisure travellers is another. Thus, the generalization of the study finding will be immaterial and unethical. To get a broader perspective of the causal relationship explored, further research should consider sampling hotels providing emotional appeals across the six geopolitical zones in the country, and collect data on other socio-demographic variables such as: leisure travellers' social participation, nationality, place of residents on the basis of geopolitical zone in Nigeria, family size, ethnic status and religion, and examine their effect on evaluation of the dimensions of service experience equity.

Finally, in order to understand the intricacies associated with the variations in the evaluation of service experience equity base on socio-demographics, a segmentation approach using cluster analysis will go a long way in providing useful findings that will better profile leisure travellers for the benefit of hotel managers decision-making, so as to boast patronage, and guarantee long-term sustainability of hotels providing all sort of emotional appeals.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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