

EFFECT OF UTILITY SERVICE QUALITY ON PERFORMANCE OF SMALL-BUSINESS ENTERPRISES IN NIGER STATE

MUHAMMAD MALLAMI MAISHANU

Department of Business Administration
Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto

MOHAMMED ABUBAKAR MAWOLI

Department of Business Administration
Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai
mamawoli2009@yahoo.com; 08036114904

ABSTRACT

Previous studies concur that service quality exerts significant impact on the performance of business enterprises in the Business-to-Customer (B2C) market. However, the same claim has, to the best of our knowledge, not been made in respect of Government-to-Business (G2B) market especially in Nigeria. Thus, this study examines the effect of Utility Service Quality (USQ) on the Organizational Performance of Small-Business Enterprises (SBEs) in Niger State, Nigeria. Being a cross sectional survey research, a closed ended questionnaire containing SERVPERF and Balanced-Scorecard scales was adopted to generate primary data from 500 SBEs' owners and managers who were randomly sampled from 860 registered SBEs in four semi-urban cities in Niger State. Bivariate regression model was developed and applied in testing the research hypotheses. The results showed that USQ exerts significant impact on the performance of SBEs. The study, therefore, recommends that the service quality of public utilities should be upgraded to further boost SBEs performance and its attendant benefits such as providing employments, launching innovative products, and contributing to Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Key Words: Utility, Service Quality, Organizational Performance, Small-Business Enterprises, Survey, Niger State.

INTRODUCTION

Research on the effects of service quality on the organization performance is multifarious. However, previous researches tend to have over-concentrated on the likely effects of service quality on marketing and financial performance such as customer satisfaction, customer patronage, customer purchase intentions, customer retention, and customer loyalty. The financial performance indicators that researchers have given concerted efforts to are sales revenue, retain equity, and profitability. Obviously, research on the effects of service quality on the overall performance of firms is, to the best of our

knowledge, very scarce. The overall organizational performance measurement technique ought to integrate the operational, financial, human resource, and marketing indicators. This is in line with Kaplan and Norton (1992)'s argument that measurement of organization performance should encompass financial indicators group, customer indicators group, process improvement indicators, and human resource development group.

Essentially, previous researches on the determinants and effects of service quality have been undertaken in Business-to-Customer (B-2-C) market (e.g. Ranaweera, 2003; Parvez, 2005;

Nam, Manchanda and Chintagunta, 2006; Peighambari, 2007; Fen and Lian, 2007; Azar, 2009; Ismail, Alli, Abdullah and Parasuraman, 2009; and Gibson, Porath, Benson and Lawler III, 2010). Only a countable number of researches on the subject matter have been done using Business-to-Business (B-2-B) market as a case study (see: Ree, 2009; Alabede, Affrin and Idris, 2011). However, a replication of the service quality research in Government-to-Business (G-2-B) market, and Government-to-Customers (G-2-C) is to the best of our knowledge, widely neglected. Specifically, service quality research in Nigeria tends to have concentrated on B-2-C market at the expense of other sectors such as G-2-B and G-2-C markets. For example, Oyeniya and Joachin (2008), Abdullahi (2009) and Oyeniya (2009) evaluated the service quality of GSM companies operating in Nigeria which constitute a B-2-C market. Thus, the problem of this study, posed as a question, is: How does the service quality of government utilities affect the performance of business enterprises? Precisely, how does the service quality of government utilities, namely electricity and water supply influence performance of SBEs operating in Niger State?

As additional guide to this study, the following null and alternative hypotheses are to be tested:

H₀: Utility Service Quality has no significant effect on the organizational performance of Small-scale Business Enterprises.

H_A: Utility Service Quality has significant effect on the organizational performance of Small-scale Business Enterprises.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Substantial empirical and theoretical evidences in the literature suggest that there is direct link between service quality and behavioural intentions. Theoretically, Bolton (1998) argues that service quality influences customer's

subsequent behavior, intentions, and preferences. Fen and Lian (2007) affirm that when a customer chooses a company that provides services that meets or exceeds his or her expectation (service quality), he or she is more likely to choose the same service provider again. Quality service sustains customer faith and is essential for maintaining competitive advantage (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1994). Superior service quality often leads to retention, which leads to on-going revenue, increased spending, payment of price premiums, and generation of referred customers (Zeithaml, Bitner, and Gremler, 2006). However, it is possible for a service firm that is providing good quality service to record less customer patronage or more customer defection. According to Molinari and Blaber (2003), customers may also switch because of the attraction of competitors that are providing better service, more personable service or higher quality. In this case, the customer is not switching because of poor service quality or unsatisfactory service but due to superior service quality by competitors.

Service quality leads to customer satisfaction (Anderson and Sullivan, 1993) while customer satisfaction, in turn, breeds and reinforces customer loyalty. In the words of Kotler and Keller (2006), a highly satisfied customer generally stays loyal longer, buys more as the company introduces new products and upgrades existing products. Lovelock and Wirtz (2004) corroborate this claim by declaring that the foundation for true loyalty lies in customer satisfaction. Highly satisfied or even delighted customers are more likely to become loyal apostle of a firm, consolidate their buying with one supplier, and spread positive word of mouth. Impliedly, when customers are loyal to a service firm, their patronage automatically increases.

A study by Cronin and Taylor (1992) found that

service quality has significant effect on repurchase intentions. Another study by Fen and Lian (2007) established that service quality has a positive relationship with patronage and repatronage intentions. Ree (2009) reported that perceived service quality is an antecedent of customer satisfaction, and customer satisfaction is an antecedent of purchase intentions. Findings of a study by Ranaweera and Neely (2003) indicated that service quality is an important driver of customer retention in a mass service (e.g. telecommunication services). Oyeniyi and Joachim (2008) found a strong relationship between customers' perceived service quality level and customer satisfaction in the Nigerian mobile phone industry. Purwoko (2015) studied influence of service quality on customer satisfaction and loyalty in the tourism industry in Indonesia; the study found that service quality affects customer loyalty with confidence as mediation, and it also influence consumer satisfaction. Osman, Mohamad and Mohammad's (2016) finding showed that service quality boost customer satisfaction in Malaysian commercial banking. In one study by Surydana (2017), service quality of a government hospital had significant influence on customer value and patient satisfaction.

Many researchers have also investigated the effect of service quality on financial performance of business organizations. A study by Buzell and Gale (1987) has shown a high correlation between relative product quality and company profitability. Reichheld and Sasser (1990) examined the worth of a loyal customer in terms of profit in credit card, industrial laundry, industrial distribution and auto servicing industries in U.S.A. and found that the longer customers remained with a firm in each of these industries, the more profitable they became to

serve. The researchers identified four factors working to the supplier's advantage to create incremental profits, namely profit derived from increased purchases, profit from reduced operating costs, profit from referrals to other customers, and profit from price premium. In a large and wide-ranging empirical study undertaken in the U.K. by Bates, Bates and Johnston (2003), it was found that better service providers had significantly better return on equity than poorer providers did, and this appeared to apply to both small and large organizations. Goyit and Nmadu (2016) found that there is no significant relationship between investment in service quality and volume of turnover in Nigerian Deposit Money Banks (NDMB) on the one hand, and between investment in service quality and profitability on the other hand.

Research on the effect of utility service quality on organizational performance of firms is rather scarce. Related studies conducted by Maletic, Maletic and Gomiscek (2011) authenticate that there is statistically significant relationship between Sustainable Quality Management (SQM) and organizational financial and non-financial performances. Aakouk (2006) found a significant relationship between service quality and business performance. Alabede *et al.* (2011) attempted a study on service quality using Government-to-Customer market (G-2-C) market, their study was rather directed at investigating the relationships between tax service quality and tax payers' compliance behaviour. The study established that tax service quality has significant positive association with tax payers' compliance behavior. The finding of Tabib and Ali (2008)'s study is that service quality strongly correlated organizational performance in Malaysian Local authorities. Cheng and Lin (2014) established that service quality had partially positive effect on financial

performance, operating performance, and behavioral performance of a Chinese international food company

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a questionnaire survey research method to generate primary data from one of the key segment users of utility services in Niger State of Nigeria (i.e. Small-Business-Enterprises) which constitute the population of the study. Yamane (1967) formula for estimating sample size was used to estimate the sample size of 500 SBEs out of a total population of 800 SBEs. The location and sectoral heterogeneity of the population informed the adoption of proportionate stratified random sampling method in selecting the SBEs to form the study sample. Stratified random sampling guarantees representativeness of each stratum in the sample (Hair, Bush and Ortinau, 2000); it also addresses the heterogeneity in the population and thus reduces sampling error (Asika, 1991). The percentage of sample size to the population of SBEs in each of the four towns - Minna, Bida, Suleja and Kontagora - was used as a parameter for determining the proportion of SBEs to be sampled at random from each SBE sector. The final selection of SBEs to form the samples for each town was done using simple random sampling technique. Precisely, statistical table of random numbers was used to carry out the simple random sampling. The justification for using simple random sampling is that the population of the study is both finite and accessible (e.g. through the SBEs registered office addresses). The method was also chosen in order to give all the SBEs in each of the sectors an equal and non-zero chance of being selected into the sample. Asika (1991) opines that simple random sampling is particularly suitable for use where the population is finite.

All the variables used in the study were measured using the 5 point Likert type rating scale. Specifically, the modified SERVPERF scale/model of Cronin and Taylor (1992) was adopted in measuring SBE managers' perception of the service quality of each of electricity and water supply services respectively. The modified SERVPERF model measured consumers' perceptions of service quality using six dimensions namely, tangibility, reliability, assurance, empathy, responsiveness, and recovery – and 5 point Likert scale that range from 5 for 'strongly agree' to 1 for 'strongly disagree'. The respondents were asked to rate each one of the scale items, which described the consumers' perception with regard to aspects of electricity services provided by the PHCN, and water supply services provided by Niger State Water Board. The responses were summarized in the form of frequency and weighted score. Furthermore, the dependent variable (organizational performance) was measured using a modified balanced-score card scale of Kaplan and Norton (1992). Managers of the sampled SBEs in Niger State were equally asked to rate the performances of their organizations on a 5-point Likert type scale. Their responses were collated and summarized by means of descriptive statistics (e.g. relative frequency and weighted score). The average value of the weighted scores for the 23 items/statements for individual respondent was obtained and used as the 'SBEs performance index'. The index represented the dependent variable required for the computation of inferential statistics in order to test the research hypotheses.

The reliability of the modified SERVPERF and Organizational Performance scales was determined by means of Cronbach's alpha methodology, which was based on internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha measured the

average of measurable items and its correlation, and if the result is generally above 0.5, it is considered to be reliable (Peighambari, 2007). Reliability is of central concern to social scientists because the measuring instruments they employ are rarely completely valid (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996).

With the help of seven research assistants, the research questionnaire was duly administered and collated within a period of three months. The usable copies of the questionnaire were serially numbered and numerically coded for computer processing. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used for data analysis. Specifically, bivariate regression model was developed and applied to test the research hypothesis. All statistical tests were at 95 percent confidence level. Statistical Package for Social Sciences and Microsoft Excel was used to analyze the data.

A multiple regression model is developed for application in the study:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 EX + \beta_2 WX + e$$

Where:

β_0 - Constant or intercept term

β_1 - Coefficient of service quality of electricity

β_2 - Coefficients of service quality of water supply

EX – Index of electricity service quality

WX – Index of water service quality

E – Error term

RESULTS

A response rate 157 or 79%, 55 or 83%, 141 or 80%, and 57 or 93% were obtained in respect of Minna, Bida, Suleja, and Kontagora respectively. In sum, 410 or 81% response rate was recorded for the entire state.

Reliability Test

The reliability of the scales was determined using Cronbach's alpha method. Analysis as contained in Table 1 revealed that electricity service quality scale is reliable by 94%, water service quality scale by 93%, and overall organizational performance scale by 89% (see Table 1). Cronbach's alpha measures the average of measurable items and its correlation, and if the result is generally above 0.5 (or 50%), it is considered to be reliable (see Peighambari, 2007). Hence, the data collected by means of the identified three scales are strongly valid and reliable

Table 1: Reliability Coefficients of the Measurement Scales

Scale	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Electricity service quality	27	0.935
Water service quality	26	0.932
SBEs performance	23	0.886

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Effect of Utility Service Quality on the Organizational Performance of SBEs

The null hypothesis which states: “USQ has no significant effect on the organizational performance of SBEs)” was tested by means of a multiple regression statistical instrument. The computer generated results are summarized in Table 2 and fully presented in the appendix.

Table 2 shows the summary of regression results regarding 'effect of predictor variable (USQ) on the dependent variable (SBEs Performance)’. The coefficient of correlation (R) is 0.166; the coefficient of determination (R²) is 0.027; and the standard error estimate is 14.454. These indicate that as much as 16.6% of SBEs performance is associated with Utilities Service Quality. The result further shows that 2.7% variation in SBEs' performance is explained by the USQ. This further implies that factors other than USQ are responsible

for the entire 97.3% of the variation in SBEs' organizational performance.

Table 2: Summary of Regression Result Relating to USQ and SBEs Performance

Statistics	Results
Coefficient of correlation (R)	.166
Coefficient of determination (R ²)	.027
F-cal. (at 1% level of significance)	5.750
Significance level (α)	.003**
Constant term (β ₀)	40.905
Unstandardized coefficient of Electricity Service Quality (β ₁)	0.137
Unstandardized coefficient of Water Service Quality (β ₂)	.024
Standardized coefficient of Electricity Service Quality (Beta)	.149
Standardized Coefficient Of Water Service Quality (Beta)	.034

**Highly significant.

N = 410

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Table 2 also shows the f-cal. = 5.750 and the significance level is P = 0.003, which suggest that the equation is a good fit of 'Y' or 'SBE organizational performance'. Specifically, electricity service quality makes the largest statistically significant contribution to SBE performance (beta = .149; p=.005), while water service quality does not contribute to SBE performance in a statistically significant way (beta=.034; p=.520).

The analysis yielded the following multiple regression equation:

$$[Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1EX + \beta_2WX + e \dots\dots\dots 4.4.]$$

$$Y = 40.905 + .137EX + .024WX$$

(.149) (.034)

The F-cal. of 5.750 is highly significant at 0.01 or 1% level. Consequently, the null hypothesis is not supported, suggesting that USQ has significant influence on SBE organizational performance.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study examined the effect of utility service quality on the organizational performance of SBEs. The study established that there is a positive correlation between utility service quality and organizational performance of SBEs (e.g. r=.166). It further showed that utility service

quality explains as much as 2.7% of variation or change in SBEs' performance. Importantly, the study established that utility service quality exerts significant impact on the SBEs' performance (e.g. f-cal=5.750 and P=.003). This finding is consistent with Cheng and Lin (2014)'s study, where service quality had partially positive effective on financial performance, operating performance, and behavioral performance. Also, the finding is consistent with that of Tabib and Ali (2008) where it was reported that service quality strongly correlated organizational performance of Malaysian Local authorities. Furthermore, finding of this study corresponds with that of Aakouk (2006), where it was reported that service quality exerted significant relationship with business performance. It is also consistent with the findings of related studies by Hassan, Mukhtar, Qureshi, and Sharif (2012) and Nwudukwe and Court (2013), where it was established that the adoption and implementation of total quality management practices improve organizational performance.

The implication of the aforementioned finding is that the overall performance of SBEs could improve if services quality of public utilities like electricity and water supply are improved. Such situation could bring about rebirth of new firms, more employments and employment opportunities, more tax revenues to the government, and even reduction in wide spread poverty and crime in Niger State and Nigeria at large.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The overall organizational performance of business enterprises is presumed to depend on service quality of public utilities. Thus, the study examined the effect of utility service quality on SBEs performance. The study found each of the electricity and water-supply service quality exerts significant impact on the performance of SBEs.

The study also evidenced that utility service quality exerts significant impact on the performance of Small-Business Enterprises in Niger State. The study therefore, concludes that the organizational performance of business enterprises is greatly enhanced when the quality of services provided by public enterprises is superb and robust. Therefore, the study recommends that the current state of public utility service quality should be upgraded. By so doing, business enterprises in Niger State and Nigeria at large will record remarkable improvement in their organizational performance, *ceteris-paribus*. This recommendation can be actualized by improving the attributes of utility tangibles (e.g. providing more electricity and water supply equipments ranging from power generation and water drilling and treatment equipments, power and water distribution equipments, and internal operational equipments like computers, internet, and general fittings). Also, staff of the utility companies who are directly involved in the provision of utility services should be trained on regular basis on technical, commercial and marketing issues that combine to give satisfaction to customers. When staffs are well trained, dimensions of USQ like responsiveness, assurance and empathy can be significantly enhanced.

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