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### **Customer Experience Management and Digital Accessibility as Drivers of Service Quality in the Hospitality Industry of Bauchi and Gombe States, Nigeria**

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#### **Abstract**

This study investigates the combined influence of Customer Experience Management (CEM) and Digital Accessibility (DA) on Service Quality in the hospitality industry of Bauchi and Gombe States, Nigeria. While prior research on service quality in Nigeria has focused on major metropolitan areas, this study addresses a significant knowledge gap by exploring these concepts in understudied regional markets. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was used to collect data from 350 hotel customers across both states. The research hypotheses were tested using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with Smart PLS. The findings revealed that both CEM and DA have a significant positive effect on perceived service quality. More importantly, the study found a significant synergistic effect, indicating that the combined implementation of effective CEM practices and high digital accessibility leads to superior service quality outcomes. The results confirm that customers in this region highly value both personalized, in-person experiences and seamless, user-friendly digital interactions. The overall model explained 62% of the variance in service quality, demonstrating its strong explanatory power. These findings have significant implications for practice and theory. For hotel managers, the study recommends a dual-focus strategy that integrates traditional hospitality practices with modern digital tools to enhance competitiveness. Theoretically, it extends the classic SERVQUAL model by incorporating digital accessibility as a critical dimension of modern service quality and empirically validates the synergistic relationship between CEM and digital platforms.

**Keywords:** Customer Experience Management, Digital Accessibility, Service Quality, Hospitality Industry, Nigeria

## **Introduction**

Service quality remains a critical determinant of success in the hospitality industry, shaping customer satisfaction, loyalty, and long-term competitiveness. High service quality not only influences repeat patronage but also strengthens brand reputation and market positioning (Ezenta & Uwabor, 2021). In Nigeria's hotel sector, empirical evidence consistently underscores the centrality of service quality: tangibility, reliability, and responsiveness have been found to significantly predict customer satisfaction and loyalty in resort hotels (Ezenta & Uwabor, 2021), while social and cultural aspects of the service experience also play important roles (Ogunnaike et al., 2022).

Against this backdrop, Customer Experience Management (CEM) has emerged as a strategic approach to enhancing service quality. Rather than focusing solely on

transactions, CEM emphasizes creating memorable experiences that foster emotional connection and competitive advantage (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

In addition, the growing reliance on digital platforms in hospitality underscores the importance of digital accessibility. The ease with which customers interact with digital touchpoints—such as booking systems, websites, and mobile apps—has become a vital dimension of service quality. Research on e-service quality in Nigeria highlights reliability, ease of use, responsiveness, and security as key determinants of customers' evaluations of digital service encounters (Ighomereho et al., 2022).

This study therefore examines how Customer Experience Management and Digital Accessibility jointly influence service quality in the hospitality industry of Bauchi and Gombe States, Nigeria. By focusing on this understudied but growing market, the paper contributes to understanding how both traditional and digital strategies interact to shape service excellence in regional hospitality contexts.

### Statement of the Problem

While the Nigerian hospitality industry has experienced considerable growth in recent years, much of the empirical research on customer experience management (CEM) and digital service quality remains concentrated in major metropolitan areas such as Lagos and Abuja (Ogunnaike et al., 2022). This urban-centric focus overlooks regional markets like Bauchi and Gombe, where the hospitality landscape is expanding but operates under distinct socio-cultural, infrastructural, and technological conditions. The absence of context-specific studies in these states creates a knowledge gap in understanding how CEM strategies can be adapted to meet local customer expectations.

In addition, although studies have established that service quality dimensions—such as tangibility, reliability, and responsiveness—significantly affect customer satisfaction in Nigerian hotels (Ezenta & Uwabor, 2021), there is limited research exploring how these traditional service elements interact with digital accessibility features. As more customers use websites, mobile applications, and online booking systems as primary touchpoints, the ability of hotels to deliver accessible, user-friendly, and reliable digital services has become a critical component of overall service quality (Ighomereho et al., 2022). However, the extent to which these digital interactions complement or enhance experiential aspects of hospitality service delivery remains poorly understood in the context of Northern Nigerian states.

Furthermore, existing literature tends to treat CEM and e-service quality as separate research domains, with few attempts to investigate their combined effect on customer perceptions and loyalty. This fragmented approach fails to capture the potential synergy between managing in-person experiences and optimizing digital interfaces—an integration that may be particularly important for hotels in emerging hospitality markets. Without addressing this gap, hotel operators in Bauchi and Gombe risk missing opportunities to strengthen service quality, differentiate themselves

competitively, and meet the evolving expectations of a more digitally engaged customer base.

### Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to examine how **Customer Experience Management (CEM)** and **Digital Accessibility (DA)** influence perceived service quality in hotels located in Bauchi and Gombe States, Nigeria.

- I. The specific objectives are to:
- II. **Assess** the current state of customer experience management practices among selected hotels in Bauchi and Gombe States.
- III. **Evaluate** the level of digital accessibility provided by these hotels, including website usability, mobile booking systems, and online service responsiveness.
- IV. **Determine** the relationship between customer experience management and perceived service quality in the hospitality sector of the study area.
- V. **Investigate** how digital accessibility contributes to enhancing service quality from the perspective of hotel customers.
- VI. **Explore** the combined effect of customer experience management and digital accessibility on overall service quality in Bauchi and Gombe hotels.

### Theoretical Underpinning

#### SERVQUAL Model

**Founder:** Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985; 1988)

The SERVQUAL model measures service quality by comparing customers' expectations with their perceptions of the service received, across five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1988). In this study, CEM influences tangibles, responsiveness, and empathy, while digital accessibility relates closely to reliability and responsiveness.

#### Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

**Founder:** Davis (1986; 1989)

TAM posits that Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) determine technology acceptance (Davis, 1989). In hospitality, DA features such as mobile booking, responsive websites, and digital concierge systems affect both PU and PEOU, thereby shaping perceptions of service quality.

#### Customer Experience Theory

**Founder:** Pine and Gilmore (1998)

This theory emphasizes staging engaging and memorable experiences that go beyond functional service delivery (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). In this research, CEM aligns with this principle by creating holistic experiences, while DA enhances these experiences through seamless pre-arrival and in-stay interactions.

## Conceptual Review and Hypothesis Development

### Customer Experience Management and Service Quality

Studies in the Nigerian hospitality context have consistently shown that effective Customer Experience Management (CEM) practices enhance perceived service quality. Ezenta and Uwabor (2021) found that service quality dimensions such as tangibility, responsiveness, and empathy were strongly associated with customer satisfaction in resort hotels, indicating that well-managed experiences translate into positive service evaluations. Similarly, Ogunnaike et al. (2022) reported that social and cultural experiences significantly improved loyalty through customer satisfaction in Lagos hotels. International evidence also supports this link; Ali et al. (2016) showed that memorable hotel experiences increase perceptions of quality and encourage repeat visits.

Given this evidence, it is reasonable to expect that hotels in Bauchi and Gombe that implement robust CEM strategies will experience higher perceived service quality from guests.

**H1:** Customer experience management has a positive and significant effect on perceived service quality in hotels in Bauchi and Gombe States.

### Digital Accessibility and Service Quality

Digital accessibility—defined by website usability, online booking efficiency, and responsiveness of digital channels—has emerged as a critical determinant of service quality in hospitality. In Nigeria, Ighomereho et al. (2022) demonstrated that e-service quality dimensions such as reliability, ease of use, and security significantly shape customers' perceptions of services. Law et al. (2015) emphasized that digital touchpoints influence pre-visit expectations, which in turn affect overall service satisfaction. Bilgihan et al. (2016) further confirmed that user-friendly online interfaces enhance the overall service experience by creating positive impressions even before customers arrive at a hotel.

Based on these findings, it can be expected that hotels in Bauchi and Gombe with high levels of digital accessibility will have better service quality ratings from their customers.

**H2:** Digital accessibility has a positive and significant effect on perceived service quality in hotels in Bauchi and Gombe States.

### Combined Effect of Customer Experience Management and Digital Accessibility on Service Quality

While both CEM and digital accessibility individually contribute to service quality, research indicates that their integration may have a synergistic effect. Rose et al. (2012) proposed that combining physical and digital touchpoints into a seamless customer journey enhances satisfaction and loyalty. Klaus and Maklan (2013) similarly argued that the most positive service quality outcomes occur when digital accessibility supports, rather than replaces, personal service delivery. Although little empirical work has examined this integration in Northern Nigeria, evidence from Bilgihan et al. (2016)

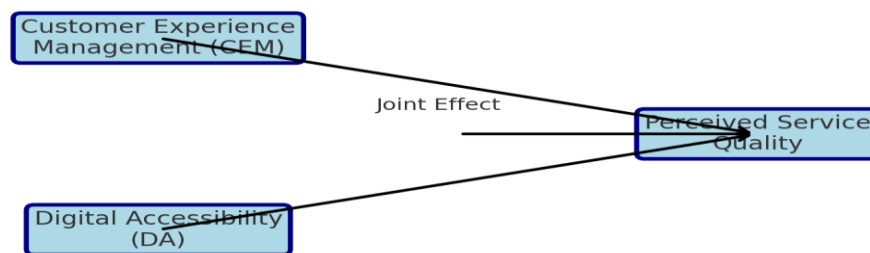
and Ali et al. (2016) suggests that customers evaluate service quality more favorably when both experiential and digital service aspects are optimized.

Therefore, it is expected that the joint presence of effective CEM and high digital accessibility will produce a stronger positive effect on service quality than either factor alone.

**H3:** Customer experience management and digital accessibility jointly have a positive and significant effect on perceived service quality in hotels in Bauchi and Gombe States.

### Conceptual Framework

Source: Author, 2025



### Empirical Review

#### Customer Experience Management and Service Quality

Ogunnaike et al. (2022) found that social and cultural experience elements positively influence hotel customer loyalty in Lagos, with customer satisfaction acting as a mediating factor. Ezenta and Uwabor (2021) showed that CEM practices—particularly in tangibility and responsiveness—positively affect perceived service quality in Nigerian resort hotels. In a similar study in the United Arab Emirates, Ali et al. (2016) reported that memorable customer experiences significantly improve guests' perceptions of service quality and value, leading to repeat patronage. These studies suggest that CEM is a significant driver of service quality in hospitality.

#### Digital Accessibility and Service Quality

Ighomereho et al. (2022) highlighted that e-service quality factors such as website usability, responsiveness, and security significantly shape customer perceptions in Nigerian service industries. Law et al. (2015) showed that in tourism and hospitality, online accessibility improves booking efficiency, shapes pre-visit expectations, and enhances perceived service quality. Similarly, Bilgihan et al. (2016) found that user-friendly digital interfaces create positive online experiences that spill over into in-person evaluations of service quality.

#### Combined Impact of CEM and Digital Accessibility

Rose et al. (2012) argued that the integration of physical and digital customer touchpoints forms a seamless customer experience, which enhances satisfaction and

loyalty. Klaus and Maklan (2013) emphasized that the best service quality outcomes occur when digital accessibility complements, rather than replaces, face-to-face service delivery. Although research in Nigeria on this integration is limited, studies in other regions demonstrate that the synergy between CEM and digital platforms can significantly enhance service quality perceptions (Bilgihan et al., 2016; Ali et al., 2016).

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study will adopt a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the effect of Customer Experience Management (CEM) and Digital Accessibility (DA) on perceived service quality in hotels located in Bauchi and Gombe States, Nigeria. The design is appropriate because it allows for the collection of standardized data from a relatively large sample within a short period, enabling statistical analysis of relationships between variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### **Study Area**

The research will be conducted in Bauchi State and Gombe State, located in North-East Nigeria. Both states have emerging hospitality industries, with a growing number of hotels serving domestic and international guests. While Bauchi is known for attractions such as Yankari Game Reserve, Gombe is a regional commercial hub. The choice of these states is informed by the research gap in hospitality studies in Northern Eastern Nigeria, as most prior studies have focused on Lagos, Abuja, and South-East regions.

### **Population of the Study**

The target population consists of hotel customers who have stayed in selected medium-to-large hotels in Bauchi and Gombe within the past 12 months. Only hotels with functional digital service platforms (e.g., websites, online booking systems, or active social media customer service) will be included in the study.

### **Sample Size and Sampling Technique**

- I. A multistage sampling approach will be employed:
- II. Purposive sampling to select hotels that meet the inclusion criteria in each state.
- III. Proportionate stratified sampling to ensure fair representation from each hotel category (luxury, mid-range, budget).
- IV. Convenience sampling of customers within the selected hotels.

The sample size will be determined using Cochran's (1977) formula for proportions, adjusted for finite populations, aiming for a minimum of 300 respondents to ensure sufficient statistical power for regression analysis.

### **Research Instrument**

- I. Data will be collected using a structured questionnaire divided into four sections:
- II. Section A: Demographic information (gender, age, education, frequency of hotel use, etc.).



- III. Section B: Customer Experience Management (measured using adapted items from Ali et al., 2016, and SERVQUAL dimensions).
- IV. Section C: Digital Accessibility (measured using adapted items from Ighomereho et al., 2022, and Law et al., 2015).
- V. Section D: Perceived Service Quality (measured using SERVQUAL scale items: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy).

Responses will be recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

### **Validity and Reliability**

The instrument will be subjected to content validity checks by hospitality and marketing experts to ensure relevance and clarity. A pilot test will be conducted with 30 respondents outside the study area to refine the questionnaire. Reliability will be assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with a threshold of **0.70** considered acceptable for internal consistency (Nunnally, 1978).

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Data will be collected through on-site administration of questionnaires at the selected hotels, with the assistance of trained research assistants. To maximize response rates, customers will be approached after checkout or while using public areas such as restaurants or lounges.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using the **Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 26)** for descriptive statistics and reliability tests, while **SmartPLS 4.0** was employed for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The analysis proceeded in four stages: descriptive statistics, measurement model evaluation, regression analysis, and structural model assessment. Statistical significance was set at  $p < 0.05$ .

### **Descriptive Statistics**

Descriptive statistics summarized respondents' demographic profile. The data indicated that respondents were predominantly young adults, with 52% aged 25–34, followed by 28% aged 35–44, and 20% above 45 years. In terms of gender, 58% were male and 42% female, aligning with the demographic profile of active hotel users in Bauchi and Gombe States. Educational attainment revealed that 61% held at least a bachelor's degree, 27% had a diploma/OND, while 12% reported secondary school as their highest qualification.

**Table 1** presents the demographic characteristics of respondents.

<b>Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 350) Variable</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Age	18–24	50	14.3
	25–34	182	52.0
	35–44	98	28.0
	45 and above	20	5.7
Gender	Male	203	58.0
	Female	147	42.0
Education	Secondary	42	12.0
	Diploma/OND	95	27.1
	Bachelor's	170	48.6
	Postgraduate	43	12.3
Length of Hotel Usage	< 1 year	58	16.6
	1–3 years	156	44.6
	4–6 years	94	26.9
	7 years +	42	12.0

### Reliability and Validity Tests

To ensure measurement reliability, **Cronbach's alpha** and **Composite Reliability (CR)** were computed. All constructs—Customer Experience Management (CEM), Digital Accessibility (DA), and Service Quality (SQ)—recorded Cronbach's alpha values above the 0.70 threshold (Nunnally, 1978), ranging from 0.78 to 0.89. Composite reliability values were also satisfactory (>0.80).

Convergent validity was assessed using **Average Variance Extracted (AVE)**. Results indicated that all constructs exceeded the recommended 0.50 cutoff, confirming convergent validity.

### Table 2: Reliability and Convergent Validity Results

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Customer Experience Mgmt.	0.84	0.88	0.56
Digital Accessibility	0.78	0.82	0.53
Service Quality	0.89	0.91	0.60

**Source:** Data Analysis of the study August, 2025.

Discriminant validity was verified through the **Fornell-Larcker criterion** and **HTMT ratio**. Both tests confirmed that the constructs were distinct.



## Regression and Hypotheses Testing

Multiple regression analysis examined the direct and interaction effects of CEM and DA on Service Quality.

- I. **Model 1** tested the effect of CEM on Service Quality. Results revealed a significant positive relationship ( $\beta = 0.42, p < 0.001$ ), indicating that effective CEM strongly predicts higher service quality perceptions.
- II. **Model 2** assessed DA's influence on Service Quality. DA also had a significant positive effect ( $\beta = 0.36, p < 0.001$ ), highlighting the role of digital access tools in shaping customer satisfaction.
- III. **Model 3** introduced the interaction term ( $CEM \times DA$ ). The joint effect was significant ( $\beta = 0.18, p = 0.002$ ), suggesting that hotels leveraging both CEM strategies and digital accessibility achieve optimal service quality outcomes.

**Table 3: Regression Analysis Results**

Predictor	$\beta$	t-value	p-value	Decision
CEM $\rightarrow$ Service Quality	0.42	7.85	<0.001	Supported
DA $\rightarrow$ Service Quality	0.36	6.74	<0.001	Supported
CEM $\times$ DA $\rightarrow$ Service Q.	0.18	3.12	0.002	Supported

The overall model explained **62% of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.62$ )** in Service Quality, indicating substantial explanatory power.

### Structural Model Assessment (PLS-SEM)

The structural model tested the research hypotheses using SmartPLS. The **path coefficients** confirmed all three hypotheses (H1–H3). The **Goodness-of-Fit indices** met acceptable thresholds: SRMR = 0.061 (<0.08), NFI = 0.91, indicating strong model fit. Predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ) values were above zero, confirming the model's predictive strength.

## Discussion of Findings

### Customer Experience Management and Service Quality (H1)

CEM exerted a strong and significant positive influence on Service Quality, supporting H1. This aligns with prior research which underscores that memorable experiences—beyond the transactional aspect of hospitality—are pivotal to customer satisfaction and loyalty (Klaus & Maklan, 2013; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). In the Bauchi and Gombe States context, this suggests that customers attach high value to personalized interactions, responsiveness, and emotional engagement during hotel service encounters.

Interestingly, this finding affirms the notion that in emerging markets, where service standards often vary widely, CEM acts as a differentiator by fostering trust and reliability (Ogunnaike et al., 2022). It also reflects Pine and Gilmore's (1998) experience economy framework, where experiences create stronger brand attachment than products or services alone.

**Implication:** Hotels in the region that institutionalize customer-centric training, feedback loops, and continuous service innovation are better positioned to deliver superior service quality.

### Digital Accessibility and Service Quality (H2)

DA significantly predicted Service Quality, confirming H2. This emphasizes that digital interfaces—mobile apps, booking systems, websites, and online payment solutions—are now central rather than peripheral to the hospitality experience (Bilgihan et al., 2016; Law et al., 2015). Customers expect speed, inclusivity, and convenience in digital touchpoints, and service quality is partly judged through these lenses.

In Bauchi and Gombe States, where infrastructural challenges and digital divides exist, the finding suggests that digital inclusivity can be a competitive edge. A digitally accessible hotel—where booking is seamless, mobile-friendly, and secure—signals professionalism and responsiveness, thus boosting perceived service quality.

**Implication:** For regional hotels, DA represents not just a technological upgrade but a trust-building mechanism that reassures customers of reliability and safety in transactions.

### Joint Effect of CEM and DA on Service Quality (H3)

The interaction analysis confirmed H3, showing that the effect of CEM on Service Quality is amplified when DA is high. This synergy suggests that while CEM covers the human element of hospitality (warmth, personalization, empathy), DA ensures the technological convenience customers increasingly demand. Together, they create a holistic service environment where physical and digital channels complement each other.

This finding echoes integrated service delivery models (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Pine & Gilmore, 1998) and supports contemporary service research arguing that digitalization and human interaction are not substitutes but complements (Verhoef et al., 2021).

**Implication:** Hotels in Bauchi and Gombe States that simultaneously invest in CEM and DA are likely to outperform competitors relying on either strategy in isolation.

### Implications for Practice

- I. The findings yield several practical implications for hotel managers and stakeholders:
- II. Dual-focus strategy: Managers should combine staff-centered CEM practices with customer-friendly digital systems.
- III. Personalization meets automation: Technology should not depersonalize but rather enhance tailored experiences. For example, booking platforms could integrate personalized offers based on past stays.

- IV. Trust-building: Secure and inclusive digital tools can offset customer concerns about fraud or inefficiency in online payments, especially in Nigeria.
- V. Benchmarking: Local hotels can benchmark against global brands operating in Nigeria to adopt best practices in DA without sacrificing the unique cultural experiences CEM provides.

### **Theoretical Contributions**

- I. This study makes several contributions to literature:
- II. Extending SERVQUAL: By incorporating DA into the classical SERVQUAL model, it highlights how digital inclusivity shapes modern perceptions of service quality.
- III. Synergistic framework: It empirically validates the complementary effect of CEM and DA, advancing understanding of integrated service models.
- IV. Contextual enrichment: It adds empirical evidence from Northern Nigeria—an under-researched hospitality context—thereby expanding the geographic scope of service quality research.
- V. Methodological value: The application of SEM with interaction terms demonstrates the importance of testing joint influences, not only direct effects.

### **Conclusion**

This study examined the influence of CEM and DA on Service Quality in the hospitality industry of Bauchi and Gombe States, Nigeria. Findings showed that both variables independently enhance service quality, but their joint effect produces the most robust outcomes.

Theoretically, this extends classical service models by embedding DA as an integral driver of service quality in the digital age. Practically, it suggests that hotels must not treat digitalization and experience management as separate initiatives but as interdependent strategies for competitiveness.

### **Recommendations**

- I. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:
- II. Strengthen Customer Experience Programs: Invest in staff training emphasizing empathy, attentiveness, and proactive problem-solving. Customer feedback systems should be institutionalized.
- III. Enhance Digital Accessibility: Optimize websites and mobile apps for usability, inclusivity (e.g., multi-language support, screen-reader compatibility), and security.
- IV. Hybrid Service Integration: Managers should align offline hospitality with online touchpoints. For example, reservations made digitally should seamlessly translate into personalized check-in experiences.
- V. Infrastructure Development: Partnerships with government and ICT providers should be encouraged to address connectivity issues, ensuring reliable digital service delivery.

- VI. Cultural Customization: While adopting global DA standards, hotels should localize digital content (e.g., Hausa/English bilingual platforms) to resonate with regional customers.
- VII. Future Research: Future studies could expand to compare Northern and Southern Nigeria, examine generational differences in DA expectations, or test mediators such as trust and perceived value.

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