



## ABSTRACT

This study focused on communication of front – line staff and customer patronage in selected hotels in Owerri, Imo State. The study was carried out to determine the extent front line communication influence performance of hotels. The researchers employed descriptive survey research design, while questionnaire served as the instrument of data collection. The data collected in this study were analyzed using simple percentage and chi-square. It was discovered that giving correct and adequate information to guests helps to improve customer patronage in hotels, proper

## FRONT – LINE STAFF COMMUNICATION AND CUSTOMER PATRONAGE IN SELECTED HOTELS IN OWERRI, IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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## Introduction

Many business organizations, especially those in the hospitality industry are adopting many strategies to achieve customer high patronage and improved performance. One of such strategies is through effective communication among front office employees. Front-line staff are the first and possibly the last group of employees in organizations who receive and transact with customers on arrival. It is the front-office employees that have the responsibility of receiving and attending to customers, receiving customers, reporting to management on some customer needs and offering quality services to encourage customer patronage, loyalty and retention. Agu (2017) said that the importance of front-line staff in the organization is that they attend to the needs and challenges of customers and report to management so as to achieve positive organizational and customer relations. Among front office employees, a healthy communication is needed for people to know and understand each other better, to create better functioning organizations and to resolve problems easily (Sabuncuoğlu & Tüz, 2011; Ruck & Welch, 2012). For that, effective communication is very necessary to achieve good customer service. This is true because effective communication by



*handling of guest complaint enhances customer patronage in hotels, and cordial reception of guests enhances customer patronage in hotels. It was recommended that there is need for frontline office employees to regularly give accurate and adequate information to customers so as to enhance hotel patronage. Furthermore, there should be proper handling of complain of customers in the hospitality industry by both frontline office staff and management so as to improve patronage.*

**Keywords:** *Communication, Front – Line Staff, Customer Patronage, Adequate Information, Customer Patronage, Proper Handling, Guest Complaint, Cordial Reception and Customer Satisfaction.*

organizational staff, especially front-line employees enables the workers to pass organizational decisions, organizational principles and organizational approach to the customers. Here, through effective communication, the customers come to know the actual services available in the hotel establishment and know the kind of services to demand. The goal of effective communication is to achieve improved performance in the hotel firm. Hotel performance simply means that a hotel business is stable, profitable, attracts customers, very productive and contributes to the well being of its stakeholders – share holders/owners, management, employees and partners (Agu, 2019).

To measure hotel performance, level of profitability, level of patronage, and customer retention come to mind (Jones, 2019). If such performance of hotel must be achieved, the front office employees have to communicate very effectively. Communication is considered as an important factor in hotel establishments where human factor is significantly important for the constancy and regularity of the activity of workers as well as sustainability and efficiency of organizations. Front office employees' understanding and perception of the information related to the work to be done in accommodation establishments, and the clarity of employees' roles within the organization, play very significant roles in the relationship between employees and customers (Brownell, 1990 cited in Demir, 2011). The employee who has all the information needed for the work to be done, would be able to increase the quality of service by managing relationships with customers more effectively due to increased self-confidence, and would contribute to the positive perception of customers with regard to the service quality (Argenti, 2013; McCabe, 2009). Communication between the front-line staff contributes also in enhancing patronage in the hotel. Through communication, front-line staff pass information to themselves, understand themselves, perform their functions credibly and contribute to the achievement of organizational goals. Communication to the guest of the hotel by front-line staff is an approach to enhance organizational growth and encourage patronage in a hotel business. Such will lead to high level of performance in the hotel as it concerns high profitability, increased patronage, and customer retention. Based on the foregoing, the researcher intends to examine communication of front – line staff of hotels and how it affects customer patronage of hotels in Imo State using Rockview Hotels and Imo Concord Hotel as the study unit.



### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

No doubt, effective communication at the front office is imperative to patronage, but the level of consciousness creates room for concern. Accepting guest on arrival, the check-in processes, the problems of the customers, the check-out processes and post check-out communication in hotels are all done by the front-office department. Therefore, increasing hotels patronage lies within the communication abilities of the front-office staff. Satisfying guest need depends seriously on the employees' ability to give correct and adequate information to guests which confirms how skilled is the employee. But often times, the front-line staff are found wanting in this regard.

The problems encountered in the communication with guests during the accommodation phase are mainly as a result of insufficient and inadequate information to the guest. Customers become dissatisfied and will complain when they experience products or services that perform below expectations (Aniemeke, 2019). Complaints should be attended to and resolved as soon as possible, even though they may appear to be irritating, time consuming and costly, otherwise it may lead to reputational damage. Handling customer complaints often represent the last opportunity that an organization has to address the dissatisfaction from customers and retain them.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The general objective of this study is to investigate communication of front – line staff and customer patronage. Other specific objectives are to:

1. investigate if giving correct and adequate information to guests helps to improve customer patronage in hotels.
2. identify if proper handling of guest complaint enhances customer patronage in hotels.
3. determine if cordial reception of guests enhances customer patronage in hotels.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS|**

Based on the objective of this study, the following research questions were made.

1. Does giving correct and adequate information to guests helps to improve customer patronage in hotels?
2. Does proper handling of guest complaint enhances customer patronage in hotels?
3. Does cordial reception of guests enhances customer patronage in hotels?

### **RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

Based on the objective of this study and research questions, the following research hypotheses guided the study

**Ho1:** Giving correct and adequate information to guests does not help to improve customer patronage in hotels.

**Ho2:** Proper handling of guest complaint does not enhance customer patronage in hotels.

**Ho3:** Cordial reception of guests does not enhance customer patronage in hotels.

### **CONCEPTUAL REVIEW**

#### **Communication**

Communication is the transfer of ideas from the sender to the receiver. It's an indispensable management tool. Any means that an individual uses to transfer meaningful ideals, feeling,



emotion or attitude to others is communication. It is also the process by which information is passed between individuals and/or organizations by means of previously agreed symbols. Communication is the process by which one party (a sender) transmits information (i.e. message). It is a continuous process between the two parties involved and it occurs in many levels, such as intra-individual communication level (Keith, 2014). Information is transmitted in two ways e.g. from a sensory organ to the brain and secondly, interpersonal level is a situation in which the transmission of information is just between two individuals. In view of Agulanna and Madu (2009), communication is such a complex concept that one researcher uncovered over ninety-five definitions, none of which was widely accepted. Mondy and Preamaux (2018) see it as “the transfer of information, ideas, understanding or feelings among people”. To some others, communication is simply “the meeting of the minds when ideas are expressed”.

### **Front-Line Staff**

The front-line staff are the organizational employees who attend to customer(s) (Faruk and Nedim, 2014). To him, they include sale representatives, receptionists, hotel attendants, customer care representatives, bar-men and many others who normally have physical contact with the customers and attend to their needs. In view of Inedegbor et al (2018), front line staff are the first call of contact to customers in any organization. This means that the organizational staff which customer meet on their regular basis in the organization are the major front line staff. For Akah (2019), front line staff are not management staff; hence they work under the direction of organizational management. They are service based employees who relate with the customers, interact with the customers and attain to customers’ wants. For that, if the front line office employees are not effective or fail to perform their functions very excellently, organizational goals will not be achieved.

In view of Kibe (2014), the achievement of the organizational goals depends on the effectiveness of the employees especially the lower cadre employees who deals directly with the customers. In words of Bery, Otieno, Waiganjo & Njeru (2015), the achievement of business objectives in the hospitality industry depends on the effectiveness of attendant staff. This shows the significance value of front line employees in the achievement of business objectives in hotel establishments. Faruk and Nedim (2014) recommends for regular training of all categories of staff in the organization so as to achieve the organizational goals. For that, in hotel organizations, people working in reception (as receptionist), people working as attendants, people working in catering/bar section and every other people that have first contact to the customers are the front line staff. The work of the front line staff are to attend to the customers, offer them the required services, handle their complaints so as to achieve the organizational goal.

### **Communication of Front-Line Office Employees**

Communication of front-line office employees entails the way and manner the organizational customer representative communicates in the organization (Neves, 2017). For Akah (2019), front-line employees of organization in most cases have varying languages of communication. Sometimes, they communicate to themselves using specific language and communication styles, but most times, they communicate to customers using generally understandable language. Nwizu



(2014) observes that the flow of information, opinion or understanding from one front-line staff to the other or from one place to the other is known as communication. In hospitality industry like hotels, effective communication starts from the sender to its decoding by the receiver. It is said to be ineffective communication when receiver of the message cannot decode the intent of the sender. It is through feedback that information achieves its desired results. According to Neves (2017), effective communication takes place when the person to whom it is intended, subsequently, the receiver understand the meaning intended and reacts accordingly. Effective communication is a transaction of ideas, directory command or guide into oral or written words, or actions on the path of the communicator in such a way that the receiver gets the same message and reacts in manner envisaged by the communicator (Akam, 2011).

Millet (2018) defines communication of front-line staff as shared understanding of shared purpose. For front-line staff, communication does not take place until the receiver had correctly interpreted the message. Simply put, communication is the act or process by which information, messages, intents, ideas or even skills are exchanged or intimated in order to achieve a particular purpose or solve a problem (Millet, 2018). It is the ability to express oneself through writing, spoken or body language in order to pass on a message, idea or skill and to ensure that it is understood. The efficient communication system is both horizontal and “vertical”. The “right hand knows what the left is doing”. Staff should be kept informed of management’s goal and intent. Guest should be well informed of their rights and privileges. They should feel free to communicate upward with honesty and candor. Staff must possess good manners, adaptability and a controlled sense of humour while dealing with quests as well as customers (Imaowaji, 2006). They must realize that courtesy and pleasantries make a good personality. All these qualities are acknowledged by the quest through communication.

### **Customer Patronage**

Customers are the people that believe in the organization, patronize the firm regularly (especially when there are many choice/options), and sometimes help the business to enhance publicity. Patronage on the other way round is the act of buying products or receiving service from a firm. In this case, customer patronage occur when people, organizations and even government show high interest in a particular (or some) business, product of a firm, service of a firm, etc. Such positive interest motivates the customers to always buy products, receive services, and even engage in indirect business promotion for the firms. Customer Patronage is the support, encouragement, privilege, or aid that an organization or individual bestows to another (Assael, 2018).

Patronage is burn out of a desire to be committed to an organization either based on its service quality or perceived service qualities. Hence, the extent to which a customer will patronize the services of a hotel depends on how the customer perceives the hotel services (Scanzoni, 2019). According to Degenova (2019) patronage is the impulse desire and consideration with the consumer or customer which induce the purchase of goods or services from certain organization like banking sector. According to Onu (2010) the customer patronage can be said to mean “the material help and encouragement given by a patron (in this instance the patron in seen to be a customer) in an exchange transaction. It could also mean “the act of being a regular customer to a particular business firm. An organization that is improving on its customer repeat purchase rate



is therefore growing and achieving sustainability. That is why Tong (2017) noted that the goal of every business is to achieve customer expansion base and organizational improvement.

### **Impact of Communication on Patronage of Customers**

1. **Correct/accurate information and customer patronage:** When the staff of an organization like hotel give accurate information to customers and prospective customers, that will lead to customer high patronage (Shonubi and Akintaro, 2016). Accurate and correct information are rich in content because there is a high level of interaction between the sender (staff) and the receiver (customer). This kind of communication can enhance customer patronage because it enables customers to understand their providers/hotel management, offer them what they want (Ubah, 2015). In line with the view of Agulanna and Madu (2009), there are steps involved in accurate communication system. They are: to decide on what, to whom, how, when and where to communicate. To them, information must be correct and timely if it must be useful to the customers. Decide first what the subject matter of the communication is to be, and prepare for any possible repercussions, implications, or misunderstanding that might occur after the subject has been presented. In deciding to whom and how to communicate a certain message, if more than one person is to receive this same message, determine if the communication should be made to each individual or to all in a group meeting. When this is done, patronage is likely to improve. There is need for front line staff to give straight forward, accurate and transparent information to customers to enhance patronage. This is true because when the customers have the needed and accurate information about the organization, they will regularly understand the need to always patronize the organization and achieve the organizational goals.
2. **Proper handling of guest complaint and patronage:** When the staff of the hotel effectively handles the complaint of customers, such will lead to improve patronage (Agu, 2017). Customer interactions of service providers with their customers contain complaint handling as an integral part. It poses negative impact on credibility and on trust of service provider if viewed by customer as inappropriate and sluggish in execution. Complaint handling was described by Tangen (2015) as the firm's capability to reduce the harmful outcomes of apparent and possible conflicts. Complaint management is the procedures and actions of service providers aimed at addressing customer complaints and recovering dissatisfied customers (Degenova, 2019). There is need for the employees, especially the front line staff to discharge their functions very effectively. Such character which employees should show in an effort to discharge their functions include going to work early, attending to customers in a good manner, making sure that they apologize to customers whenever there is mistake or customer dissatisfaction, be very friendly to customers and relate to customers in a good and acceptable way.  
Based on the various ways customers express their displeasure with service failure, Scanzoni (2019) identified complainers and non-complainers as two distinct groups of customers that experience dissatisfaction; while Akpanabia (2015) grouped consumers into four broad categories based on their reactions to dissatisfaction. These are passives,



voicers, pirates and activists. Understanding consumers' complaining behaviour requires a continuous assessment of negative feedback and criticism from consumers. Complaint management is the way in which companies systematically handle problems in customer relations (Panda, 2014). It involves the receipt, investigation, settlement and prevention of customer complaints and recovery of the customer. To achieve proper handling of guest, employees are expected to be polite in talking to the guest of the hotel. This is true because when workers show humility and politeness in their communication, it makes the customers to feel relax and therefore continue to patronize the organization. More so, attention to customer complaints and quick response to such complain issues is also a strategy for achieving customer patronage. In view of Panda (2014), most of the customers complain with the goal of getting improve service from the organization, but when this is not the case, patronage may decline. It is therefore expected that hospitality customers should also handle the complaints of the guest by trying their best to show remorse and therefore apologize for low service offered.

- 3. Cordial acceptance of guest and customer patronage:** In hotel business, cordial acceptance of guest enhances quality of service, and leads to customer satisfaction (Ober, 2016). This is because a healthy communication is needed for front-line staff to know and understand each other better, to create better functioning organizations and to resolve problems easier (Sabuncuoğlu & Tüz, 2001; Ruck & Welch, 2012). If an adequate importance is not placed on cordial acceptance of guest problems in an organization, it may not be possible, for example, for front-line employee to offer quality services, and to have better relationships within that organization. For that, Ober (2016) stated that to achieve cordial acceptance of guest in hotel firm, Communication is considered as an important factor. In hotel establishments where human factor is significantly important for the constancy and regularity of the activity of workers as well as sustainability and efficiency of organizations, affective quality service is needed through communication (Agu, 2017).

An accommodation establishment which does not use cordial acceptance of guest channels properly may not be able to achieve customer satisfaction and that will affect organizational patronage negatively. The need for proper and friendly acceptance of guest in the hotel is one of the basic strategies for achieving customer satisfaction and improved patronage. Inedegbor et al (2018) recommends for friendly attitude of front line staff to employees, regular kindness of employees to customers, good attention to customers' needs and wants in the hotels, and proper understanding of the customers. The above cordial acceptance of guest if well managed will have positive impact on the performance of the hotels. The qualities which employees must have to be able to deliver functions on cordial acceptance of guest so as to improve customer satisfaction are many. Such qualities as listed by Inedegbor et al (2018) includes: effective communication skills, humility, patience, problem solving skills and ability to understand the customers' needs and interest. When the above features are displayed on regular basis by employees, there will be improved cordially acceptance of guest which will lead to customer satisfaction.



## **THEORETICAL REVIEW**

### **Structural Functionalism Theory**

Structural functional theory was developed by Almond in 1963 and popularized by David Easton. Structural functionalism developed slowly over time with the help of many social science scholars in different parts of the world. Other contributors to the significant development of this theory are Emile Durkheim, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, and Herbert Spencer etc. The theory is based on two segments: structure and function. It means that anywhere there is a structure established, there is a function attached to it. According to Oji, Nwachukwu, and Eme (2014), this theory states that where there is a structure erected or instituted, there is a function assignment to it to perform in the society. To them, this theory originated in biological and medical sciences and was adopted as a mode of analysis in social sciences. Structure refers to the arrangement within the system which performs the functions. It is also the way in which the parts are connected. The basic assumption of structural framework is that all systems have structures which can be identified and these structures perform function. According to Wikipedia (2019), structural functionalism, or simply functionalism is a framework for building theory that sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability.

Based on our subject of investigation, hotels are structures established to perform functions as it concerns service delivery. If the hotels must achieve its objective and organizational performance, there must be high level and effective communication in the system (the structure). In this case, the hotels management and other staff needs to communicate to each other effectively so as to develop high standard in performing their functions and such effective communication will lead to profitability, productivity, industrial peace and harmony and organizational expansion in the hotels.

## **EMPIRICAL STUDIES**

Some related studies have been done on this work. Some of them are summarized thus:

Faruk and Nedim (2014) focused on the role of strategic communication in hospitality industry, using “the case of Antalya”. The purpose of the article was to analyze the communication process between managers and employees of tourism establishments on a strategic dimension. Data was gathered through questionnaires implemented at the 5-star hotels located in Antalya, since Antalya is one of the most important destinations in Turkey, attracting the highest numbers of tourists. Data was subjected to explanatory factor analysis in order to identify the dimensional structure of communication. Then, regression analysis was conducted in order to identify relationships between the variables. Results of the study suggested that there was a positive link between strategic communication dimension and operational effectiveness, as well as increased overall effectiveness of the organization and better internal operational qualities of separate departments.

Inedegbor et al. (2018) investigated the impact of business communication on organizational performance in Nigerian companies. The study specifically investigated the relationship between business communication and organizational performance in Nigeria using a contextualized and literature based research instrument to measure the application of the investigated “constructs”.



Using the survey method, the study obtained sample data from 100 small and large manufacturing and service companies operating in Lagos State of Nigeria. The research instrument showed encouraging evidence of reliability and validity. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, percentages and t- test analysis. The study found that effective business communication is emphasized to a reasonable extent in the surveyed Nigerian companies. However, the 'level of emphasis' was a question of degree. It was also found that the extent of practices of effective business communication, were related to the category of business (service versus manufacturing) and its size. This study therefore sought to assess the effect of employee communication on organization performance in Kenya's horticultural sector.

Akah (2019) carried out a research on impact of communication on employee performance in Nigeria organizations using Ministry of Works Enugu, Enugu State as the focal point. The study was carried out to determine the relationship between effective organizational communication and employee effectiveness/commitment. He formulated two objectives, two research questions and two hypotheses. Survey research design was used and questionnaire served as the instrument of data collection. The data collected were analyzed using simple percentage and mean frequency. The findings revealed that effective communication enhances employee commitment, positive management and employee relationship and employee discipline. He recommends for effective verbal and written communication in organized organizations.

Kibe (2014) investigated the effects of upward communication strategies on organizational performance in Angola. A descriptive research design was used in this study. 132 questionnaires were distributed employees. The findings of this research showed the importance of both the theoretical level and practical level. It concluded that for any organizational performance to be effective, an upward and open communication environment should be encouraged. Once members of the organization feel free to share feedback, ideas and even criticism at every level it increases performance.

Bery, Otieno, Waiganjo & Njeru (2015) explored the effect of employee upward communication on organization performance in Kenya's horticultural sector. This study was carried out in flower farms in Kenya. The population of this study was all flower farms in Kenya which were the 14 flower farms registered in the KFC directory and based in Naivasha. A total of 2460 respondents were targeted by the study out of which 1888 responded giving a response rate of 76.7%. Correlation and regression analysis were used to test on the relationship between the variables of the study. The study found that upward communication facilitates exchange of information and opinion with the organization, that communication helps in improving operational efficiency thus improving organization performance. It concluded that upward communication is a major determinant of organization performance. The study recommended that organizations should develop effective communication strategies since it will facilitate passing of information both within and outside the organization thus improving performance.

#### **RESEARCH GAP**

Some studies have been done on communication, customer patronage and some other related areas. From the empirical review, it could be seen that the exact subject matter of this work was



not covered. Some of the empirical studies were done outside Nigeria and therefore has existing gap within Nigeria environment which this study has to fill. Some past studies focused on communication without using front-line office employees in hotels, and other studies did not even use hotels or hospitality firms; hence this study has to fill the gap. The objectives, research questions and hypotheses used in this work differ from past studies. Hence, research gap exists and there is need for the study as to fill it.

#### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- i. **Research design:** The research design adopted by the researchers is descriptive survey research design.
- ii. **Population of the study:** The study population consisted the entire permanent front line employees of both Concord Hotels (31) and Rockview Hotels (25) was 56 in all.
- iii. **Sample size determination:** To ensure the determination of accurate sample size, the statistical formula propounded by Taro Yamane (1964) was employed. The formula states thus:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where

n	=	the sample size being brought
N	=	the study population
1	=	constant
e	=	margin or error at 0.05 level of significance

Therefore:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$
$$n = \frac{56}{1 + 56 (0.05)^2}$$
$$n = \frac{56}{1 + 56 (0.0025)}$$
$$n = \frac{56}{1 + 0.14}$$
$$n = \frac{56}{1.14}$$
$$n = 49$$

- iv. **Sampling procedures:** The simple random sampling technique was adopted to select the sample units.
- v. **Source of data:** Both primary and secondary data were utilized to analyze the subject matter. Primary data were collected via questionnaire from the firms' staff while secondary data were obtained from journals, textbooks, and other sources.
- vi. **Validity and reliability of research instrument:** Content and face validity were used. Also, test retest reliability method was employed by the researchers.



**vii. Method of data analysis:** The data collected in this study was analyzed using simple percentage and chi-square.

#### **DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

It is important to note that out of 49 copies of the questionnaire distributed, only 45 copies were properly filed and returned. Hence, our analysis was based on 45 respondents.

**Question one:** Does giving correct and adequate information to guests help to improve customer patronage in hotels?

**Table 1:** Responses on if giving correct and adequate information to guests help to improve customer patronage in hotels.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	41	91.11
No	4	8.89
Total	45	100

**Source:** Field survey, 2022

Analysis of the data in the table above showed that 91.11% of the respondents agreed that giving correct and adequate information to guests helps to improve customer patronage in hotels while 8.89% of the respondents disagreed. Because the percentage of those agreed was greater signified that giving correct and adequate information to guests help to improve customer patronage in hotels.

**Question two:** Does proper handling of guest complaint enhance customer patronage in hotels?

**Table 2:** Responses on if proper handling of guest complaint enhance customer patronage in hotels.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	35	77.78
No	10	22.22
Total	45	100

**Source:** Field survey, 2022

Analysis of the data in the table above revealed that 77.78% of the respondents agreed that proper handling of guest complaint enhance customer patronage in hotels whereas 22.22% of them disagreed. Since the percentage of those who agreed was greater signified that proper handling of guest complaint enhances customer patronage in hotels.

**Question three:** Does cordial reception of guests enhancer customer patronage in hotels?

**Table 3:** Responses on if cordial reception of guests enhance customer patronage in hotels.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	41	91.11



<b>No</b>	4	8.89
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Field survey, 2022

Analysis of the data in the table above revealed that 91.11% of the respondents agreed that cordial reception of guests enhances customer patronage in hotels while 8.89% of them disagreed. Since the percentage of those who agreed was greater signified that cordial reception of guests enhances customer patronage in hotels.

### TEST OF HYPOTHESES

In testing the hypotheses formulated, it is important to restate them for the test.

#### Restatement of Hypothesis One

**Ho:** Giving correct and adequate information to guests helps to improve customer patronage in hotels.

Data in table 1 were used to test hypothesis one.

Options	No of respondents
<b>Yes</b>	41
<b>No</b>	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>

$$\text{Expected Frequency} = \frac{\text{Total number of respondents}}{\text{Number of options}}$$

$$\text{Expected Frequency} = \frac{45}{2} = 22.5$$

Fo	Fe	Fo – Fe	(Fo – Fe) <sup>2</sup>	(Fo – Fe) <sup>2</sup> / Fe
<b>41</b>	22.5	18.5	342.25	15.21
<b>4</b>	22.5	-18.5	342.25	15.21
<b>Total</b>				<b>30.42</b>

X<sup>2</sup> calculated value = 30.42

X<sup>2</sup> tabulated at 5% level of significance with 1 degree of freedom = 3.84.

#### Decision

Since X<sup>2</sup> calculated was greater than X<sup>2</sup> tabulated (i.e. 30.42 > 3.841), the alternate hypothesis was accepted while the null hypothesis was rejected. This decision signified that giving correct and adequate information to guests helps to improve customer patronage in hotels.

#### Restatement of Hypothesis Two

**Ho:** Proper handling of guest complaint enhances customer patronage in hotels.

Data in table 2 were used to test hypothesis two.



Options	No of respondents
Yes	35
No	10
Total	45

$$\text{Expected Frequency} = \frac{\text{Total number of respondents}}{\text{Number of options}}$$

$$\text{Expected Frequency} = \frac{45}{2} = 22.5$$

Fo	Fe	Fo – Fe	(Fo – Fe) <sup>2</sup>	(Fo – Fe) <sup>2</sup> / Fe
35	22.5	12.5	156.25	6.94
10	22.5	-12.5	156.25	6.94
Total				13.88

X<sup>2</sup> calculated value = 13.88

X<sup>2</sup> tabulated at 5% level of significance with 1 degree of freedom = 3.84

#### Decision

Since X<sup>2</sup> calculated was greater than X<sup>2</sup> tabulated (i.e. 13.88 > 3.841), this signified that proper handling of guest complaint enhances customer patronage in hotels.

#### Restatement of Hypothesis Three

**H<sub>03</sub>:** Cordial reception of guests enhances customer patronage in hotels.

Data in table 3 were used to test hypothesis three.

Options	No of respondents
Yes	41
No	4
Total	45

$$\text{Expected Frequency} = \frac{\text{Total number of respondents}}{\text{Number of options}}$$

$$\text{Expected Frequency} = \frac{45}{2} = 22.5$$

Fo	Fe	Fo – Fe	(Fo – Fe) <sup>2</sup>	(Fo – Fe) <sup>2</sup> / Fe
41	22.5	18.5	342.25	15.21
4	22.5	-18.5	342.25	15.21
Total				30.42



$X^2$  calculated value = 30.42

$X^2$  tabulated at 5% level of significance with 1 degree of freedom = 3.84.

#### **Decision Rule**

As  $X^2$  calculated was greater than  $X^2$  tabulated (i.e. 30.42 > 3.841), the decision was that cordial reception of guests enhances customer patronage in hotels.

#### **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

In line with the research question one, this study discovered that giving correct and adequate information to guests helps to improve customer patronage in hotels. Neves (2017) was of the view that accurate information will always motivate customers and prospective customers to understand the nature and facilities in the hotels and therefore utilize such. Degenova (2019) recommends for regular information to customers to improve patronage.

Analysis of the data on research question two revealed that proper handling of guest complaint enhances customer patronage in hotels. Agu (2019) noted that when customers are dissatisfied about service offering, and such conflict is not resolved, it could lead to low performance of hotels; hence the issue of low patronage. Ubah (2015) recommends for proper conflict management so as to resolve customers' complaint in the system.

Analysis of the data on research question three revealed that cordial reception of guests enhances customer patronage in hotels. Jones (2019) emphasized the need for cordial relationship between the front line staff and customers. If such relationship are neglected, it will lead to customer dissatisfaction and poor performance. Şener (2017) opined that low performance in most cases are based on poor reception of the guest based on their first contact with staff.

#### **CONCLUSION**

This study has examined communication of front – line staff and customer patronage in selected hotels in Owerri, Imo State. It is on record that the achievement of improved performance in hospitality establishment (like hotels) depends on the effectiveness of frontline staff especially through effective communication. Therefore, the frontline office staff are required to constantly communicate to the organizational customers very effectively and regularly so as to achieve improved patronage and overall organizational performance. This is possible by giving accurate information to customers, enhancing conflict management, promoting cordial reception and proper focus o salesmanship. The study therefore concludes that the achievement of business goal in hotel establishment is possible when the frontline office employees perform their communication functions very effectively.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made.

1. There is need for frontline office employees to regularly give accurate and adequate information to customers so as to enhance hotel patronage.



2. There should be proper handling of complain of customers in the hospitality industry by both frontline office staff and management so as to improve patronage.
3. The frontline office staff should be trained regularly on the best strategies to adopt to achieve cordial reception of guests so as to meet customers' expectation and customers' satisfaction.

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