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SERVICE QUALITY INSTRUMENT DEVELOPMENT:
A Specific Study of Bulawayo's Beer Outlets in Zimbabwe
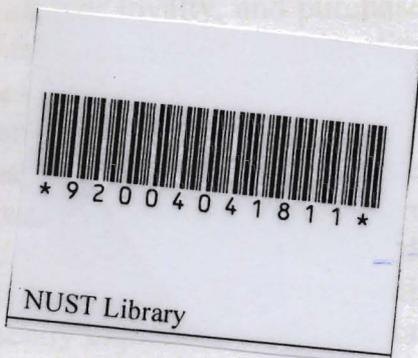
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Abstract

Unlike physical goods that are tangible, services are not, and cannot therefore be easily measured using existing technical means. The intangibility of services brings with it other associated challenges, such as the inseparability of production and consumption, its variability, and perishability, all that make it difficult to continuously produce consistent quality over time. In an attempt to measure service quality, a number of scales have been developed, going back twenty years or so, but mostly originating from the USA, with most of these scales covering pure services and pure retail services. Even though these scales have been declared as having high reliability and validity, and universally applicable across contexts; they have been found to fail in both reliability and validity when tested outside the USA or Western Europe. Furthermore, these scales have also failed when tested in different service industries. Also, there is no literary evidence suggesting that a beer outlet service quality scale has been developed as yet, particularly in Zimbabwe. In order to close this knowledge gap, this study was therefore undertaken, to develop a beer outlet service quality scale for Bulawayo's beer outlets in Zimbabwe, by modifying an existing USA originated retail service quality scale (RSQS) so that it was contextually relevant to the studied economy, culture, and industry. Therefore the main objective of this research study was to develop an instrument that best measures on-premises consumption beer outlet service quality in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. To achieve this research objective and other related ones, three research questions were asked; 1. How should service quality in Bulawayo's beer outlets be conceptualised and measured? 2. Is there any association between the developed beer outlet service quality scale dimensions and overall service quality, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and purchase intent? 3. Is there a significant difference in the evaluation of the beer outlet service quality dimensions by demographic factor? Research Question 1 formed the basis of this study, while Research Question 2 worked to validate the scale. Because demographic variables have been found to have an effect on the evaluation of service quality, and that these differences are useful for service differentiation, customisation, and segmentation; Research Question 3 was therefore put forward and investigated in this study. The methodology adopted in this study followed the standard psychometric procedure for scale development. This study was therefore post-positivist, and mostly quantitative in nature, though the initial phase was mostly exploratory and qualitative, and involved focus group discussions with customers, and in-depth interviews of retail beer business owners and managers. The quantitative part of the study was carried out in three distinct, but related studies made up of the First phase (Pilot study), the Second phase, and the Third and final phase. These studies used various statistical tests in developing and validating the scale, including internal consistency tests, factor analysis, structural equation modelling, and regression analysis. Ultimately, this study established a 6-dimension, 21-item beer outlet service quality scale called BarSERV. This scale had a stable factor structure, and had both high reliability and validity. The dimensions of BarSERV are Personal Interaction, Music, Security, Price, Physical Aspects and Product Service. The BarSERV scale displayed high correlations with overall service quality, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and purchase intent, an indicator of the existence of convergent and predictive validities. The scale behaved as expected, and the results attained at this stage therefore helped in answering Research Question 2. In answering Research Question 3, this study found significant differences in the way respondents rated the Personal Interaction, Music, Security, Price and Physical Aspects dimensions by demographic factor. The differences in the results by demographic factors could suggest that, serve for the age in this case, the different demographic factors alter the perception of service quality, hence the differences in the perceptual scores. It is expected that the BarSERV scale will help on-premises consumption beer outlets in Bulawayo to better measure their performance and thus be able to monitor and improve performance, and set industry benchmarks. Moreover, the findings also will help in service differentiation, customisation, and segmentation by demographic information.