

EFFECT OF SERVICE QUALITY ON CUSTOMERS' SATISFACTION OF SELECTED PRIVATE TRANSPORT COMPANIES IN FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY, ABUJA

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of service quality on customers' satisfaction of selected private transport companies, Abuja. The population Consists of all the customers of the selected transportation companies in Abuja. This study adopted a survey research design with a sample size of 323 which was determined using Cochran formula and convenience sampling technique was used to select the respondents. The study employed 5-Likert scale questionnaire as the instrument for primary data collection. Partial least square structural equation model, PLS-SEM was used to analyse the data obtained. The study found that reliability has positive but insignificant effect on customers' satisfaction while empathy has positive and significant effect on customers' satisfaction of selected private transport companies, Abuja. The study therefore recommends transport companies should focus on elements that may have a stronger influence on customer satisfaction. This could include improving customer service, enhancing the cleanliness of vehicles, and ensuring safety. Also, they should Identify and enhance key drivers of customer satisfaction, such as affordability, service quality, customer support and to conduct surveys to determine which factors customers value most.

Keywords: *Service Quality, Empathy, Reliability and Customers Satisfaction*

INTRODUCTION

In the competitive industry like the transportation service, customer satisfaction is considered as the essence of success. Organizations operating in service industries should consider service quality a key strategic issue for the business success in most business organisations (Spathis et al., 2014). Those service providers who establish a high level of service quality retain a high level of customer satisfaction; they also obtain a sustainable competitive advantage. Research indicates that companies with an excellent customer service record reported a 72% increase in profit per employee, compared to similar organizations that have demonstrated poor customer service; it is also five times costlier to attract new customers than to retain existing customers of an organisation (Duncan, 2016).

Customer satisfaction is one of the important tools to run a business and to achieve the mission statement. Indeed, customer satisfaction has great significance for the future of an organization and it is seen as a basis for securing market position and achieving other objectives of the organization (Perng, 2017). Thus, the importance of customer satisfaction in today's dynamic corporate environment is obvious as it greatly influences customer's repurchase intentions whereas dissatisfaction has been seen as a primary reason for customer's intentions to switch. Satisfied customers are most likely to share their experiences with other five or six people around them. Equally well dissatisfied customers are more likely to tell another ten people about their unfortunate experiences with a particular organization. In order to achieve customer satisfaction, organizations must be able to build and maintain long lasting relationships with customers through satisfying various customers' needs and demands (Pizam & Ellis, 2018).

Service quality is an essential strategy to be implemented in order to secure and achieve high levels of customers' satisfaction specifically in the transportation service (Nathan, 2019). Service quality is a universal phenomenon that applies to all service-providers regardless of industry or geographical location of operation. For service-delivery companies in today's era of consumer enlightenment and sophistication to be able to succeed, they must have the capacity to consistently deliver high quality services that meet or exceed customers' expectations (Akpoyomare et al., 2016).

Baloch and Jamshed (2017) added that the key to running a successful service-oriented business, especially one with a high contact feature such as transportation, where passengers and service providers

interact more closely, is delivering high quality services. Service quality is an assessment of how well a delivered service conforms to the client's expectations. Service business operators often assess the service quality provided to their customers in order to improve their service, to quickly identify problems, and to better assess clients' satisfaction.

Mobility is an essential need for an individual therefore the demand for transport service especially for private transport companies has increased in this modern society (Hamid, 2016). In fact, the private transport companies is slowly revolutionizing the transport industry, particularly replacing the conventional public transportation industry. In today's technology-driven era, the Public transport companies has grown tremendously and well accepted by consumers throughout the globe including Nigeria.

The increase demand for private transport service quality has induced the national union of Road Transportation Workers (NURTW) to engage in readjustment of their decision regarding commercial transportation in Abuja (Enimola, et.al 2022). There are different private transportation companies in Abuja, among them are God is Good Motors, Young Shall Grow Motors, Cross Country (these transportation companies are registered with Corporate Affairs Commission).

Service quality has been a vital issue of discussion and research over the past three decades. Research on service quality has well established that the customer perception of the quality of a service depends on customer's pre-service expectations. Studies by Parasuraman et al. (2005) noted that the key strategy for the success and survival of any business institution is the delivering of quality services to customers. Accordingly, Chang (2018) deemed that excellent service quality is vital to business success and survival. Hence, delivering quality service to customers is a necessity for success and survival in today's competitive world (Kheng et al., 2017).

Service quality and customers' satisfaction are leading components in the system of external relation of each organization, as at today they largely determine its competitiveness. The desire to manage relationships with customers leads to the fact that organizations are starting to pay attention to the development and implementation of service standards. Quality is an important source of competitive advantage in service sector. Service quality is used to differentiate and add value to service offerings and to win strategic competitive advantage. New managerial methods explain quality as the customer satisfaction, for that reason organizations must recognize the high quality and quick service offering obstacles and solve them (Ghasemi et al., 2012).

Ziethaml et al. (2013) described reliability as the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. Reliability assures the customer of a service provider's ability to consistently provide a perceived quality of service. Reliability has an impact on trust and the overall impression left in the mind of a customer after service consumption (Abd-El-Salam et al., 2019). The reliability dimension of service quality is vital and perceived through the people aspect of service quality.

Khan and Fasih (2014) defined empathy as the ability for service delivery firms to pay attention to individual customer problems and demands, then address these issues effectively. The essence of empathy conveys the message that customers are unique and special. Empathy means taking care of the customers by giving attention at individual level to them. It involves giving ears to their problems and effectively addressing their concerns and demands. (Blery et al., 2009). It is however based on the backdrop that the study investigates the effect of service quality on customer satisfaction of selected private transport companies, Abuja.

Statement of the Problem: The efforts of private road transportation companies at enhancing passengers' satisfaction have been impeded by factors such as the bad situation of Nigerian roads; high cost of transportation vehicle acquisition and maintenance, which causes journey delays, in-transit stoppages,

and general discomfort to passengers. Passengers of private road transportation companies may also be uncomfortable with the stress and difficulties encountered in booking transportation services because not every transportation company in Nigeria has been able to maintain an online or remote service booking system, which allows passengers to make journey reservations without physically visiting the service provider. Some research has been carried out on service quality and customer satisfaction of transport companies in different countries such Malaysia (Melan et.al., 2021); Indonesia (Sumaedi et al., 2012); South Africa (Govender, 2014); and Vietnam (Khuong & Dai, 2016) but none have been carried out in Nigeria, evidently there's a gap in literature in service quality and customer satisfaction in Abuja Private transport companies. It is however based on the backdrop that the study investigates the effect of service quality on customer satisfaction of selected private transport companies, Abuja.

The objective of the study is to determine the effect of service quality on customers' satisfaction of selected private transport companies, Abuja.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer Satisfaction

Satisfaction refers to more than just the aspects of the product or service or the product or service itself. It is also a level of judgment related to customer satisfaction success. Vigneshwaran and Mathirajan, (2021) opined that customer satisfaction has become the key to success for the automotive after-sales service business as a result, any business should not ignore the significance of customer satisfaction. Kotler (2004) defined customer satisfaction as the level of a person's felt state resulting from comparing a product's perceived performance or outcome in violation to his/her own expectations. Customer satisfaction is defined as a customer's general assessment of the performance of an offering to date. This overall satisfaction has a sturdy positive impact on customer loyalty plans across a broad range of product and service groups (Gustafsson, 2019).

Customer satisfaction shows how well a product or service meets the customers' expectation (Mwendwa et al., 2016). The term of customer satisfaction is often used by workers in marketing to measure the extent to which the organization's ability to provide products that meet or exceed consumers' expectations, to identify the possibility of repeat purchases of products in the future. In general, customer satisfaction is the customers' expression or feelings towards the organization and its products or services (Alsamydai et al., 2012). Customer satisfaction can be used to measure the customers' sharpness and expectations regarding the performance of the product or service they have consumed and the customers to evaluate whether the performance of the product or service have met their expectations. If the product or service fails to meet the customers' needs or desires, they will be dissatisfied, and if the service performance is consistent with their expectations, they will be glad and satisfied (Rahaman et al., 2020).

Service Quality

Parasuraman et al. (2018), defined service quality as an attitude or global judgment about overall excellence or superiority of service with a comparison of expectation and performance as measuring tools. Service quality from the customer's perspective is defined as, $\text{Service Quality} = \text{Perception} - \text{Expectation}$ (Parasuraman et al., 2018). Service quality is nothing but the difference between the service expectation and service received by the customer. The customer has certain expectations about the service. If the customer experiences the same service as they expect then, this difference will be zero and we can say that the service quality is very good. Johnson (2017) viewed quality as the degree to which a set of inherent define service quality as the strategic inclusion of elements into services offered by a company to win the minds of a consumer in the marketplace.

Service is the activities or benefits offered for sale or offered due to its association with specific commodity (Azzam, 2018). Parasuraman et al. (2008) viewed quality as the degree and direction of discrepancy between customers' service perception and expectation. Czepiel (2010) defined service quality as customer perception of how well a service meets or exceeds their expectation through the

service provided. In other words, the service quality is evaluated based on the customers' expectations and perceptions towards the service that they received.

Tjiptono (2004) viewed service quality is a measure of the perfection of a product or service consisting of design quality and conformity quality. Design quality is a specific function of a product or service; conformity quality is a measure of how big the level of conformity between a product or service is with pre-determined quality requirements or specifications. Vargo et al. (2011), service is a process of interaction in doing something to someone. According to Gummesson in Tjiptono and Chandra (2011) defined service is something that can be exchanged through buying and selling but cannot be felt physically. Lukman (2000), service quality as a service promise so that those served feel benefited. Service quality is a basic business strategy that produces goods and services that can meet the needs and satisfaction of internal and external consumers, explicitly or implicitly. Service quality as the expected level of excellence and control over the level of excellence to meet customer desires.

Reliability

Reliability is defined the consistent performance and dependability of the services offered by service providers in which it must always have the same quality and form (Mwendwa et al., 2016). Reliability also concerns the readiness or appropriateness of employees to provide services or goods. Moreover, reliability can be related to the period during which an employee can offer the requested service (Mwendwa et al., 2016). It also relates to the ability to provide services according to customer expectations in terms of speed (how fast the transaction is carried out), accuracy (how correct the transaction is in terms of withdrawing money) and if the equipment operates 24 hours as expected (Ejigu, 2016). Reliability involves a service provider's ability to offer committed services reliably and accurately. In a general sense, reliability means the organization fulfills its promises, such as promises about service provision, pricing, delivery and problem solving (Khan et al., 2018). Zeithaml (2002) stated that Reliability technically has influences to the functions of an application or website where it can be function as it should consistently and reliably.

According to Tjiptono and Chandra (2016), reliability relates to the ability to provide an accurate service from the first time without giving any errors and delivering services according to the agreed time. Furthermore, Tjiptono and Chandra (2016) stated that Reliability relates to the technical functionalist of the site, especially the extent to which the site is available and functioning as it should without the constraints or attacks from a virus. Reliability refers to the ability to deliver expected standard at all time, how the organization handle customer services problem, performing right services for the first time, providing services within promised time and maintaining error free record. Jay and Barry (2014) noted that the reliability of machine parts or product parts is considered as consistently good in quality or performance which is able to be treated at any time. Yang and Fang (2004) stated that reliability consists of accurate order of fulfilment, accurate record, accurate quote, accurate billing, and accurate calculation of commissions which keep the service promising to the customer.

Empathy

Zeithaml et al. (2013) defined empathy as the caring, individualized attention a firm provides its customers. The essence of empathy conveys the message that customers are unique and special. Empathy means taking care of the customers by giving attention at individual level to them It involves giving ears to their problems and effectively addressing their concerns and demands. (Blery et al., 2009). Empathy consists of caring and customized responsiveness to customers. This empathy contains communication, access and understanding the customer (Olu, 2018).

Empathy is the ability for firms to pay attention to individual customer problems and demands. Empathy entails caring and provision of individualized attention to customers by personnel of the firm (Zeithaml et al., 2006). In this respect, the customer feels unique and special. In an attempt to develop empathy, personnel of the firm should endeavour to know the names of their customers, their preferences and

needs and take steps to satisfy them. Empathy has also been defined as the caring individualized attention that the service providers accord customers (Andaleeb et. al., 2016).

Empathy refers to the extent to which service providers demonstrate care, understanding, and personalised attention to customers' individual needs and circumstances. It involves factors like the friendliness, attentiveness, and individualized treatment provided by service personnel, as well as the organization's efforts to understand and meet customer expectations, having customers' best interest at heart and understanding of customer needs (Supriyanto, et al. 2021).

Empirical Review

Reliability and Customer Satisfaction

Omar (2019) carried out a study on determining the influence of the reliability of service quality on customer satisfaction: the case of Libyan E-Commerce customers. The primarily purpose of the study was to determine the influence of reliability dimension of E-commerce on Libyan customers' satisfaction. Required data was collected through customers' survey. The findings show that there is a very strong relationship between quality of service (Reliability) and customer satisfaction. They found a significant relationship between reliability of services on the satisfaction level of customers.

Karpagam and Rajakrishnan (2022) examined the effect of reliability variables on customer perception over the services of ICICI Bank Branches in Nagapattinam District. ICICI Bank has delivered its functions through eight branches located in rural and Semi-urban area of Nagapattinam district. Hence the proportionate stratified random sampling was used for selecting the sample respondents from all these eight ICICI bank branches. It has been determined that the optimal sample size for a population of 39,416, a level of confidence at 95%, and a margin of error at 5% would be 380. The result of the study revealed that among the five reliability variables of banking services which used to predict the impact on overall customer perception over the banking services, ATM Facility and Arrangement are creates a significant impact on customer perception regarding banking services. However, the remaining Reliability variables, Appearance of the Bank, Appearance of Bank Physical facilities, Appearance of Waiting area and Security arrangement, were not made any significant impact on overall customer perception.

Charles (2022) examined the role of service reliability and customer empathy in determining customer satisfaction in Rivers State hotels. The quality of service and customer satisfaction are major contributors to the success of organizations in the hospitality industry. This study aims to examine the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in hotels located in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The unique characteristics of services are discussed to understand the challenges of evaluating service quality. The study adopts theoretical and empirical reviews to provide a conceptual framework that helps to understand service quality and customer satisfaction. Using a sample size of 384 respondents, Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) analysis method is employed to test the hypotheses formulated. The results show that service quality dimensions, including service reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and customer empathy, are significant predictors of customer satisfaction as measured by customer loyalty and referrals. The study concludes that hotel staff should be trained to provide prompt services to their guests, and service assurance is critical to stimulate customers' repeated patronage behavior.

Empathy and Customer Satisfaction

Kang (2014) examined the effect of service quality, consumer empathy and shopping value on curation commerce satisfaction. The survey was conducted on 273 consumers who used Chinese curation commerce services. The research data was analyzed using the Smart PLS 3.0 program. The empirical analysis was conducted with reliability and validity analyses of the questionnaire and hypothesis test. Results: As a result, only the quality of information had a direct impact on satisfaction. The remaining

service quality factors (information interest quality, interaction quality, and personalization quality) were found to affect satisfaction through utilitarian value or consumer empathy.

Hussin (2021) investigated the effect of empathy, customer satisfaction and communication on customer loyalty of commercial banks in Nekemte town. Researchers use probability and non-probability sampling techniques to select a sample of respondents from the total population of this study. Data were collected through the five point's likert scales of questionnaires and used mixed research approach was used. To achieve the objective of the study, questionnaire was physically distributed to 404 respondents of selected Commercial Banks in Nekemte town. Out of 404 customers 375 (92.8%) of customers were completed and returned. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the collected data by using SPSS software version 24 and questionnaire's reliability was estimated by calculating Cronbach's Alpha. Descriptive analysis tools such as frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation. Inferential statistical analysis tools such as correlation coefficient was worked out and used to explore the relationships between variables. And multiple linear regression analysis was performed to study the effect of independent variables on dependent variable. The research finding indicates that there were statistically significant relationships between all independent variables on customer loyalty.

Bahadur et.al. (2018) investigated the indirect effect of employee empathy (EE) on customer loyalty (CL) and loyalty outcomes through intervening variables, i.e. customer affective commitment, perceived service quality, and customer satisfaction (CS). Associations between the constructs of the proposed model are examined in the context of employee–customer interactions. Data were collected through the online survey from 360 useable responses collected from active users of telecommunication services from the province of Anhui, China. To test the model, structural equation modeling was applied by using AMOS 21. The findings confirm the positive and indirect effect of EE on CL and loyalty outcomes (i.e. positive word-of-mouth and repurchase intentions). Results of the present study provide insights for the service sector, specifically telecommunication sector in order to increase CS and loyalty toward the services.

Service Quality Model (SERVQUAL)

The prevailing theory for measuring service quality is the SERVQUAL model conceived by Parasuraman et al. (1985). The SERVQUAL model is a multiple- item measure that can be used to identify and deduce customer perceptions and service expectations. It is considered to be reliable and valid for evaluating service quality in a number of industries. To develop the SERVQUAL scale, Parasuraman et al. (1985) gathered empirical data from five different service industries: appliance renovation and maintenance companies, retail banking, long distance telephone, security, brokerage, and credit cards.

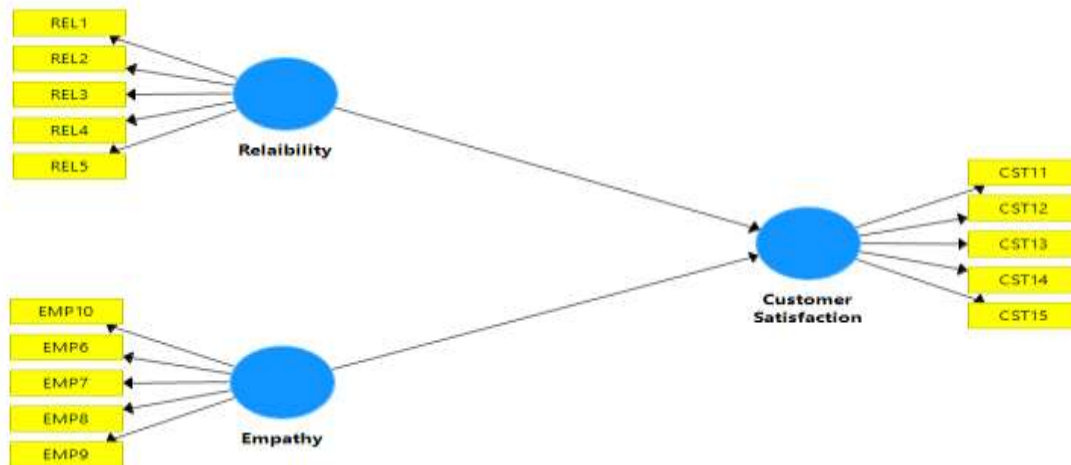
The SERVQUAL model initially acknowledged ten dimensions of service quality (tangible, reliability, responsiveness, communication, credibility, security, competence, courtesy, understanding/ knowing customers, and access). Subsequently, these ten dimensions were suppressed into five (reliability, responsiveness, tangible, assurance and empathy). The SERVQUAL model hinges on gaps in service quality, which addresses differences in service quality expectations and perceptions. Hence, SERVQUAL dimensions are adopted in this study. This study is underpinned by the SERVQUAL model.

METHODOLOGY

The research employed survey research design. Survey research design was adopted for the study through a structured questionnaire which was used to elicit information from the target respondents who are customers of private transport companies within Abuja Metropolis. The population of the study consists of customers of selected private transport companies within Abuja Metropolis. These selected private transport companies include operators such as God is Good Motors, God is Great Motors and Cross Country Motors. These companies were selected because there are registered with Corporate Affairs Commission. Since the population is infinite, but there is no accurate recorded data on the number of people that use private transport companies, the researcher therefore used Cochran Formula to get a

sample size of 323. Convenience sampling was used based on the fact that consumers are available and have used private transport companies once or more. The questionnaire was adapted. The researcher employed the use of a questionnaire to collect necessary data for the study. The Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Model (PLS-SEM) statistics was used to test the hypotheses formulated with the aid of SmartPls3.

Model Specification



Source: SMART-PLS Output, 2025

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Median	Min	Max	SDV	Kurtosis	Skewness
REL	2.01	2.1	1	5	0.66	0.18	-0.98
EMP	4.3	4.4	1	5	0.58	-0.38	-0.82
CST	1.84	1.93	1	5	0.70	0.32	-0.83

Source: SMART, PLS Output, 2025.

The table above provided statistical description of the variables as expressed in the data collected in terms of the mean, minimum, maximum, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis values. Reliability (REL) had minimum and maximum values of 2 and 5 respectively. The average value stood at 2.01 and a standard deviation value of 0.66, while skewness and kurtosis values stood within the normality range. Empathy (EMP) had minimum and maximum values of 2 and 5 respectively. The average value stood at 4.30 and a standard deviation value of 0.58, while skewness and kurtosis values stood within the normality range. Customer Satisfaction (CST) showed minimum and maximum values of 1 and 5 respectively with an average value of 1.84 and a standard deviation value of 0.70

Indicator Reliability

In assessing the measurement model, we begin by assessing the item outer loadings. As a rule, loadings above 0.7 are recommended, as they indicate that the construct explains more than 50 percent of the indicator's variance, thus providing acceptable item reliability (Hair, et al., 2019). However, Hair, et al., (2019) also posited that low but significant indicator loading (less than 0.50) can be included. Also, outer loadings less than 0.4 should be deleted and in exploratory research, loadings more than 0.4 and less than 0.7 can be retained if the average variance extracted is satisfied (Hair, et al., 2014) hence justifying why indicators

Table 2: Factor Loadings of the Constructs

	Reliability	Empathy	Customer Satisfaction
REL1	.620		
REL2	.671		
REL3	.789		
REL4	.801		
REL5	.695		
EMP6		.746	
EMP7		.681	
EMP8		.673	
EMP9		.796	
EMP10		.791	
CST11			.779
CST12			.848
CST13			.849
CST14			.770
CST15			.854

Source: SMART-PLS Output, 2025

Construct Reliability

To establish internal consistency of the study constructs, the Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were examined. According to Hair, et al., (2019) the minimum threshold for measuring composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha is 0.7.

Convergent Validity

This explains the extent to which constructs converge to explain the variance of its items. It is assessed by evaluating the average variance extracted (AVE). The minimum value of the AVE should be higher than 0.50. All the constructs satisfied this requirement as shown in the table below and as such are valid for the study.

Table 3: Construct Reliability and Validity of the Indicators

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Reliability	.768	.787	.841	.516
Empathy	.799	.824	.857	.546
Customer Satisfaction	.879	.891	.912	.674

Source: SMART PLS Output, 2025

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity is the extent to which a construct is empirically distinct from other constructs in the structural model. Traditional methods such as Fornell-Larcker and cross loadings were used to assess discriminant validity however, Henseler et al. (2015) show that the Fornell-Larcker criterion does not perform well, particularly when the indicator loadings on a construct differ only slightly. As a replacement, Henseler, et al., (2015) proposed the Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of the correlations. The HTMT is defined as the mean value of the item correlations across constructs relative to the (geometric) mean of the average correlations for the items measuring the same construct. Discriminant validity problems are present when HTMT values are higher than 0.90 (Henseler, et al., 2015).

Table 4: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Criterion

	Reliability	Empathy	Customer Satisfaction
Reliability	1.00		
Empathy	.753	1.00	
Customer Satisfaction	.428	.727	1.00

Source: SmartPLS Output, 2025

Table 5: Path Coefficient of the Model

Variable	Beta	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Decision	F ² value
Reliability-> Customer Satisfaction	0.181	2.907	.154	Accepted	0.30
Empathy -> Customer Satisfaction	0.802	15.282	.000	Rejected	0.595

Source: SmartPLS Output, 2025

Hypothesis One

H₀₁: Reliability has no significant effect on customer satisfaction of private transport companies, Abuja. The result of the test as shown in table 5. revealed that reliability positive but insignificant effect on customer satisfaction of private transport companies, Abuja., with $\beta = 0.181$ and $P = 0.154$. Thus, hypothesis one was supported and therefore accepted at 5% level of insignificance. Since there is enough statistical evidence to accept the alternative hypothesis, the study concludes that reliability positive and effect on customer satisfaction of private transport companies, Abuja. **Hypothesis Two**

H₀₂: Empathy has no significant effect on customer satisfaction of private transport companies, Abuja. The result from table 5. shows that empathy has significant effect on customer satisfaction of private transport companies, Abuja, with $\beta = 0.802$ and $P = 0.000$. Thus, null hypothesis two which states that empathy has no significant effect on customer satisfaction of private transport companies, Abuja was rejected at 5% level of significance. The alternative hypothesis which states that empathy has significant effect on customer satisfaction of private transport companies, Abuja

Next, the study assessed explanatory power of the model using coefficient of determination (R^2). The R^2 value stood at 0.469, implying that 46.9% of variation in customer satisfaction is explained by service quality. The remaining percentage of variation could be explained by other factors not included in the study.

The f^2 examines the effect caused on the endogenous construct's R^2 value as a result of removal of a certain predictor construct. Cohen (1998) guideline was used to measure the effect size which revealed that all relationships were either small or medium effect.

Table 6: R² and Predictive Relevance of the Model

	R Square	R Square Adjusted	P Val.
Customer Satisfaction	0.469	0.467	0.000

Source: SmartPLS Output, 2025

Discussion of Findings

The study examined the effect of effect of service quality on customers' satisfaction of selected private transport companies, Abuja. The findings from the analysis above indicate that the model is adequately fit to measure the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction of selected private transport companies, Abuja. Based on the foregoing, the study tested two hypotheses and evidenced

were provided by the study results that reliability and empathy affects private transport companies, Abuja moderately as indicated by the coefficient of determination (R^2). The findings on the specific independent variables and how they affect customer satisfaction are discussed below:

The first finding revealed that reliability has a positive and insignificant effect on on customer satisfaction of private transport companies, Abuja. This implies that as the reliability of the transport services increases, customer satisfaction tends to increase as well. In practical terms, customers likely feel more satisfied when they can rely on transport services to be punctual, safe, and efficient. This finding is consistent with that of Karpagam and Rajakrishnan (2022) who found that that reliability has positive but insignificant effect customer perception over the services of ICICI Bank Branches in Nagapattinam District.

The second finding revealed that empathy has a positive and significant effect on on customer satisfaction of private transport companies, Abuja. This implies Organizations may need to incorporate empathy into their service design. This could involve creating processes that allow for personalized interactions, enabling staff to engage with customers on a more human level. This finding is consistent with that of Hussin (2021) who found that that effect on customer loyalty of commercial banks in Nekemte town.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings, the first hypothesis concludes the findings reveal that while reliability exerts a positive but insignificant effect on customer satisfaction among selected private transport companies in Abuja, empathy demonstrates a positive and significant impact. This indicates that, although reliability is an important factor, it may not be perceived as strongly by customers. Conversely, the substantial role of empathy highlights its crucial influence on enhancing customer satisfaction. Transport companies should prioritize fostering empathetic interactions and service experiences, as this directly correlates with customer satisfaction and loyalty. While efforts to improve reliability remain important, enhancing empathetic service delivery can yield more immediate and noticeable benefits.

Based on the findings and conclusions above, the study recommends thus:

1. Transport companies should focus on elements that may have a stronger influence on customer satisfaction. This could include improving customer service, enhancing the cleanliness of vehicles, and ensuring safety. Also, they should identify and enhance key drivers of customer satisfaction, such as affordability, service quality, and customer support. Conduct surveys to determine which factors customers value most.
2. Organization should Establish regular channels for customer feedback specifically regarding their experiences with staff empathy. Use this feedback to identify areas for improvement and recognize exemplary service. They should Create recognition programs for employees who exemplify empathy in their work. This can motivate staff to prioritize customer care and reinforce a culture of empathy.

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Appendix: Questionnaire

Reliability (Kar Man, 2019)

- 1 Drivers of private transport companies provide services as promised
- 2 Private transport companies fare is reliable
- 3 Private transport companies' services are reliable
- 4 Security aspect for private transport companies is satisfactory
- 5 Speed limit for private transport company is monitored

Empathy (Kar Man, 2019)

- 6 Private transport company drivers understand customers' needs and wants
- 7 Private transport company seldom reject booking
- 8 Private transport company provide 24/7 services
- 9 Private transport company drivers will always have the passengers' best interest at heart
- 10 Private transport company provide comfortable sets for customers

Customer Satisfaction (Kar Man, 2019)

- 11 I am overall satisfied with private transport companies
- 12 I am satisfied with the convenience of private transport companies
- 13 I am satisfied with the payment method
- 14 I am satisfied with drivers' attitude
- 15 I am satisfied with private transport companies