

CUSTOMER PERCEPTIONS ON SERVICE QUALITY OF FRONT OFFICE STAFF AT HOTEL

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ABSTRACT

The study was intended to investigate the relationship between customer care and customer satisfaction in the hotel industry. All of the service businesses are trying their best to improve their service quality in order to make customers satisfied with their services, especially the hotel industry. If the Service performance meets or exceeds customers' expectation, customers will be satisfied.

On the other hand, customers are more likely to be dissatisfied if the service performance is less than what they have expected. Researches proved that service quality is an important element to make customers satisfied with the hotel services.

The objectives of this study are to assess customers' expectation and perception level towards service quality of the front office staff in five dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. SERVQUAL is used here as a tool to find the gap towards service quality of the front office staff in a hotel. Hotel management must seriously look in to key findings of research and take necessary steps to implement given suggestions to improve the service quality of front office hotel. If the corrective actions on tangibility and reliability dimensions are taken, it is sure that it leads to improvement in service quality and it results in to customer satisfaction.

KEYWORDS: *Service quality, Service value, Customer satisfaction, Retention, Servqual, Tourism development.*

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are:

1. To assess customers' expectation and perception level towards service quality of the front office staff in five dimensions: **tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.**
2. To analyze the discrepancy gap between customers expectation and perception towards service quality of the front office staff.
3. We guarantee to give full attention to personal service and customer satisfaction.
4. All enquiries will be responded to the same day they are received.
5. To examine the relationship between customer care services and customer satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

Service industries play an important role in most economies. As competition increases in the market, tourism businesses and organizations need to develop effective methods for being more responsive to peoples' needs and retaining more loyal participants since attracting new participants will cost more which involves more advertising and promoting. Like other fields, tourism involves both goods and services, but the service component is relatively high.

According to Asian Development Outlook, the trend of world markets has changed noticeably from agricultural to service markets. All of the service businesses are trying their best to improve their service quality in order to make customers satisfied with their services, especially the hotel industry. Hotel operators now focus more on the quality standards in order to meet the basic needs and expectations of the customers. Once customers and requirements are clearly identified and understood, hotel operators are more likely to anticipate and fulfill their customers & needs and wants. The more satisfied the customers are, the more likely they are to return or prolong their hotel stay .At present, hotel visitors in south India seem to have high standards and demands for excellent service. The hotels have increased their standards and now instead of having only a nice room to draw customers in, they offer - high quality staff as an amenity as well. Guest satisfaction is the highest priority for owners and managers competing with hundreds of others, and personal service is at the top of the travelers and list of the most important things when considering a hotel to stay in .In the hotel industry, hotel staff is ranging from top management staff to front line staff (i.e. house keepers, receptionists, front cashiers). Front office staffs are considered as a supporting factor in de-Training customer satisfaction when deciding to return, to recommend the hotel, or in demonstrating loyalty to a particular hotel. In this thesis work presented that front office staff are the nerve center of all hotels, and the front office is essential to keep up with what is happening at all areas of the hotel.

SERVICE QUALITY

Quality is considered to be of very great importance in the hospitality industry. Hotelier defined service quality as a function of the differences between expectation and performance along with ten major dimensions. In later research revised and defined the service quality in terms of five dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

In the hotel industry, most researchers are interested in maximizing customer satisfaction satisfied customers tend to return and make the profit to hotel. Mr.Oberoi defined customer satisfaction as a measure of how the customer perceives service delivery. More stated that customer satisfaction is a function of service performance relative to the customer expectation. If the service performance meets or exceeds customers' expectation, the customers will be satisfied

On the other hand, customers are more likely to be dissatisfied if the service performance is less than what they have expected. As mentioned earlier, a greater number of satisfied customers will make the hotel business more successful and more profitable.

Internal and external service quality measures

Service quality, which always involves the customer as part of a transaction, will therefore always be a balance: the balance between the expectations that the customer had and their perceptions of the service received. A 'high quality' service is one where the customer's perceptions meet or exceed their expectations.

The components of perceived service quality have been identified as

1. **Reliability:** the ability to provide a service as expected by the customer.
2. **Assurance:** the degree to which the customer can feel confident that the service will be correctly provided.
3. **Tangibles:** the quality of the physical environment and materials used in providing the service.
4. **Responsiveness:** the ability of the service provider to respond to the individual needs of a particular customer.
5. **Empathy:** the courtesy, understanding and friendliness shown by the service provider.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Front office staff service quality is gaining momentum as there is a direct contact between the customer and front office staff. According to Kandampully et al (2000) front office staffs are considered as supporting factor in determining customer satisfaction and various research shows that there were significant variations between dimensions of service quality of front office staff among hotels. Min and Min (1997) presented the idea that front office services have the attributes that are considered most important, particularly in forming the following impressions of service quality; tangibility (how well the hotel staff are dressed); reliability (ability to resolve problems encountered by guests); responsiveness (convenience of making the reservation, promptness of check-in/checkout process, hotel/tour guide information); assurance (security and safety of guests); and empathy (caring and individualized attention). Dr. P. Srinivas Rao and Dr. Padma Charan Sahu, (2013) identified five factors of service quality by focusing on the front office staff only, and explored the customers' expectations and perception levels of these services.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Hotel Visitors in India seems to have high standards and demands for excellent service. Service quality is perceived differently by tourists in different parts of the world. Hotel operators are paying more attention than ever to the needs and expectations of the customers by consistently improving the quality of the service offered to the customers. Researches proved that service quality is an important element to make customers satisfied with the hotel services.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The above data is Secondary data which is collected from various website, books and other agencies which are linked to industry. The objective of this paper is to analyze the discrepancy gap between customers' **expectation** and **perception** towards service quality of the front office staff in a hotel whose identity is intentionally concealed to make the study technically feasible and a hypothetical hotel is used here for identification. SERVQUAL is widely recognized and used tool to measure the service quality of the front office staff in a hotel. Thus, SERVQUAL is used here as a tool to find the gap towards service quality of the front office staff in a hotel.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study will be as a practical guideline for the hotel management, especially the front office department. The outcome of this study will develop the service quality of the front office staff in order to meet their customers 'needs and wants. If the gap score is low, it results into customer satisfaction and in contrast, if the gap score is high, then the hotel owner requires arranging training program for their staff to improve the service.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Customer satisfaction relied on customer expectation and customer perception towards 5 service quality dimensions of front office staff.

SUGGESTIONS

Management has to ensure that front office staff at the hotel provides the services as promised to the customer and also to ensure that staffs are wholeheartedly ready to help the customer. Hotel management has to take steps to improve the proficiency of language of front office staff.

CONCLUSION

Application of SERVQUAL model for research is extremely universal with respect to the service organization and it has been used here for analyzing service quality of front office at hotel. Such analysis is handy in defining the weak areas where immediate corrective action is required. Hotel management must seriously look in to key findings of research and take necessary steps to implement given suggestions to improve the service quality of front office at hotel.

The hospitality enterprises operating have proven to be one of the key mechanisms in the economic transition. Economic reforms unleashed the potential for entrepreneurial development in a direction that assisted macro-economic stability and competitive market behaviour.

Successful tourist businesses were found to be focusing on a particular product or niche market, developing a strong competitive advantage offering high quality, and superior service and products.

Earning high satisfaction ratings from guests is an especially important strategy for hotel companies, because loyal customers are the principal driver of profits. Along with continuing to stay at a brand's properties, satisfied customers also refer new business. Companies with satisfied, loyal customers enjoy higher margins—and, consequently, greater profits—than do businesses that fail to retain and satisfy their customers.

The strategic planning and the application of service quality provide customer satisfaction and retention. Its efficient application enhances the hospitality industry, activates the effects of tourism development in socio-cultural issues and provides economic growth.

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