

Domestic Visitors Perception on Tourism Services Quality in Jordan: A Review

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Abstract

This conceptual study aims to evaluating the tourists' point of view towards service quality of the Jordanian tourism sector. The study objectives were achieved through previous literature review concerning the field of service quality management in tourism sector. To achieve the objective of this paper, reviews were used to collect the data about internal visitors' satisfaction. The main conclusions of this research paper are: 1) quality can be measured as a good path for guiding tourism organization when taking decisions related to tourism services. 2) Tourism business environment in Jordan does not support the internal customer satisfaction. 3) and in the area of the visitor's satisfaction there is still a need for things to be done such as, the internal transport quality improvements , increasing visitors awareness, enhancement the level of safety, and environmental conditions improvements.

Keywords: Service Quality, Tourism, satisfaction, Jordan.

Introduction

Quality has evolved into one of the most important sources of competitive advantage for the tourism business destination due to the complexity and globalization of today's competitive business environments. Recognizing the importance of quality, many leading quality organizations have begun to develop opportunities to gain an upper hand of the situation since they have also recognized the importance to have organized processes to manage quality to stay ahead in their competitive position. Apart from that, each business management must seriously consider the fierce competition in every sector and the ever increasing customer expectations. Their objective has grown from maintaining a business to moving forward so as to achieve a sustainable future. As such, to ensure continuous survival and competitiveness in a volatile business environment; they must also equally emphasize on customer care, improvements in efficiency, effective marketing, benchmarking, staff training and development.

Change can be stressful. There is no clear ways that can be applied to all business, but there are confirmed for more systems, such as quality management that can get high profits if it is applied in the right direction. For business to be successful, the motivation to develop and implement a quality must be based on a clear understanding of the business aims and objectives. Whatever the size of the organization and whatever the type of business, management will appreciate just how important quality is to the organization/destination's continued. Over the past two decades, the theory and practice

of service quality has received considerable attention from academics and practitioners alike. Viewed as a means by which customers distinguish between competing organizations (Marshall and Murdoch, 2001), service quality is known to contribute to market share and customer satisfaction (Anderson and Zeithaml, 1984; Buzzell and Gale, 1987; Parasuraman et al., 1985; Zeithaml, 2000). Thus, the pursuit of quality services in both private and public sector organizations is driven by the need to survive and remain competitive.

The previous of literature on quality, the researchers found that precocious research efforts focused on identify and measuring the quality in the manufacturing sector. Although orderly quality efforts started in the business sector in the 1920s, research in services began to evolve in the late 1970s in several parts of the world (Gummesson, 1991). Hotel services are a mixture of complementary products; and this adds one new dimension of complication in measuring the quality such service of accommodation, food, drinks and businessmen are very necessary for the tourist during his / her stay. And here emerges one very important characteristic marketer of hotel service should concentrate on as a tool derived from the modern concept of service marketing; and this characteristic is 'hospitality'. The practice of marketing has become important enough to raise the adequacy of administrative decisions. It is natural to find , in a commercial establishment of hospitality, that administrative adequacy is given much attention when deciding the extent of work success.

As competition is growing and improving the service quality to be had is becoming more effective for the hotel industry, it is necessary to be able to identify the service quality, define the dimensions of the service quality and their relative importance for customers (Fick and Ritchie, 1991). Through the identification of these areas could provide an opportunity for managers to improve the service quality in the hotel industry (Asubonteng et al., 1996).

Tourism is undoubtedly an important industry to many economies as it is one main source of revenue and foreign exchange. This industry plays a vital role in preserving cultures and historical heritage. It promotes national development as billions of dollars in investment are expended on infrastructure such as roads, airports, telecommunications and hotels which are necessary to foster the industry's growth. It is a vital and crucial factor of employment opportunities especially in the sector of services. Jordan, is rich with a wide range of tourist attractions. Tourism is Jordan's most promising sector of the economy. Jordan has a developed tourism infrastructure with a plethora of luxury hotels and resorts, advanced transport infrastructure, a wide range of activities and cultural events, spas and numerous tour operators operating in the country.

Definition of Service Quality

Zeithaml, 1988 defined perceived service quality as how the customer assess the overall excellence and superiority of the product or service provided. Perceived service quality can also be described in two different types of approaches, namely expectation-performance model and performance model.

The quality of products and services has become a real concern since 1980s it was possible to measures the quality of material products; but the quality of services was impossible to limit or study. The knowledge of new concepts and directions of marketing services is one more concern of tourist's administrations. The exact knowledge of the quality of products remains insufficient to understand the quality of service which is

characterized by such merits as: being intangible, correlation between production and consumption, and disharmony and destruction.

Within the last three decades, many business researchers have concentrated on researches that set out to grasp and define the concept of service quality. An important subject of the researches of service quality is the measurement quality of service and its relation with revenue. Interestingly, many researchers have discovered an indirect relationship between service quality and profit (Rust et al., 1995 and Zethmal et. al., 1996).

Tourism product quality

Even though tourism is growing globally, the competition in this industry is also growing in tandem with it; resulting in the situation where the tourism enterprise sector can no longer compete on the sole basis of cost. Under such a circumstance, quality has become a key element for the competitiveness of the tourism industry. With quality, there is also the need for a sustainable development in the tourism industry which, subsequently will create and improve jobs. Therefore, promoting quality in tourism and tourist products is a priority in different tourism activities to ensure the survival and ultimately the progress of the concerned organization.

On the other hand, measuring quality in tourism is rather complex and the main reasons could be summarized as follows (CEC, 2001):

For a start, significant growth in tourism demand is gradual and tied to the volume of tourism in tourist destinations, along with differing developments in the various types of tourism. Here, quality is seen as an appropriate response to the changes found only through the materialization of new types of tourism and control mass tourism. The lack of skilled manpower in certain jobs in the industry is a result of the working conditions that may not encourage creativity and innovation; the development of transport and its effect on flows, service quality, sustainable development and environmental protection; and the adoption and incorporation of new information and communication technologies as a factor of competitiveness.

Tourism is a service sector that possesses a particularly complex product which depends on an extremely disjointed supply. Each link in the tourism value chain (travel agencies, tour operators, carriers, hoteliers, restaurateurs, etc.) offers only a single element in the overall product. Hence, it is necessary to collect all these components together to ascertain the tourists' experiences and their approval of the quality of the service. Basically, the main locale of the consumption of tourist services is in the target tourist destination; which is better known as the location and place of activity of tourist businesses. In this respect, it is only natural for tourists to identify with both the product of the service provided by the organization and the satisfaction from the destination visited.

For many players in the tourism industry, procuring satisfaction for their customers is not merely connected to a single demand since tourist behaviour is particularly volatile and subject to psychological and social influences, personal sensitivities and short-term reactions. In the event a single link in the chain is affected the consequences is of catastrophe proportion since it may affect the entire tourism market. For instance, the SARS epidemic has seriously dampened the tourism market globally while the various oil slicks that have affected European coastlines in the recent past have

serious negative repercussions on the image of a tourist destination or region, and these two problems have escalated the slide in the tourism industry drastically and took an even longer period for the industry to achieve normalcy. .

The tourism product can be very immense and varied; ranging from natural and cultural resources, tourist facilities, the communications infrastructure, accommodation and restaurants, among the basic resources of a tourist destination, to others with specific objectives or purposes. The type of tourism can also be determined by the combination of local tourism resources and the services offered which could be unique to the destination, such as coastal or mountain tourism, health or fitness tourism, sports or religious tourism, thermal or gastronomic tourism and, of course, business tourism.

It has also been found that perpendicular interdependence between tourism businesses is clearer than in most other sectors of the economy. Such interdependence, which also exists at global level, results in what are sometimes complex structures and trends in commercial relations. With regard to the interdependent factor, the important stakeholders or players in the tourism industry will probably include businesses and their representative organizations, destinations, with their varied activities that combine public and private interests; and even the locations with their offered or available facilities or services.

On the whole, the tourism sector does not possess a distinguishable identity mainly because it has a rather diverse and fragmented nature. Hence, it holds a very high importance in the economic and social level but pales in comparison at the political level. In nature, tourism encompass a gigantic horizon, due in large, to the multiplicity of the business surroundings and the public and private stakeholders involved, its effect on many other economic activities, its very wide social and emotional dimension and the geographically scattered and very volatile consumption of the product. Therefore, a large number of political fields such as those for enterprise, transport and regional development may have a direct effect over its progress.

Service quality gap

Parasuraman et al., (1985) provided a conceptual model of service quality through a group of primary ideas related to expectations and performance. The process of evaluating service quality is more difficult than the process of evaluating products by customers. The cognition of service quality emerges through the process of comparing the customer's expectations and the actual performance of service.

Quality of evaluation is not limited to the out come quality only but to the process of service offering as well. For this purpose, these researchers make a typical exploratory study to investigate the concept of service quality and improve a conceptual model of what service quality is. To achieve such a goal they have deep interviews with some executives in four service establishment in the USA (Banks, Companies of Guaranty Cards, Companies of Stockbrokers, Companies of Product Reform and Maintenance). The Figure (1) give below illustrates the above mentioned model.

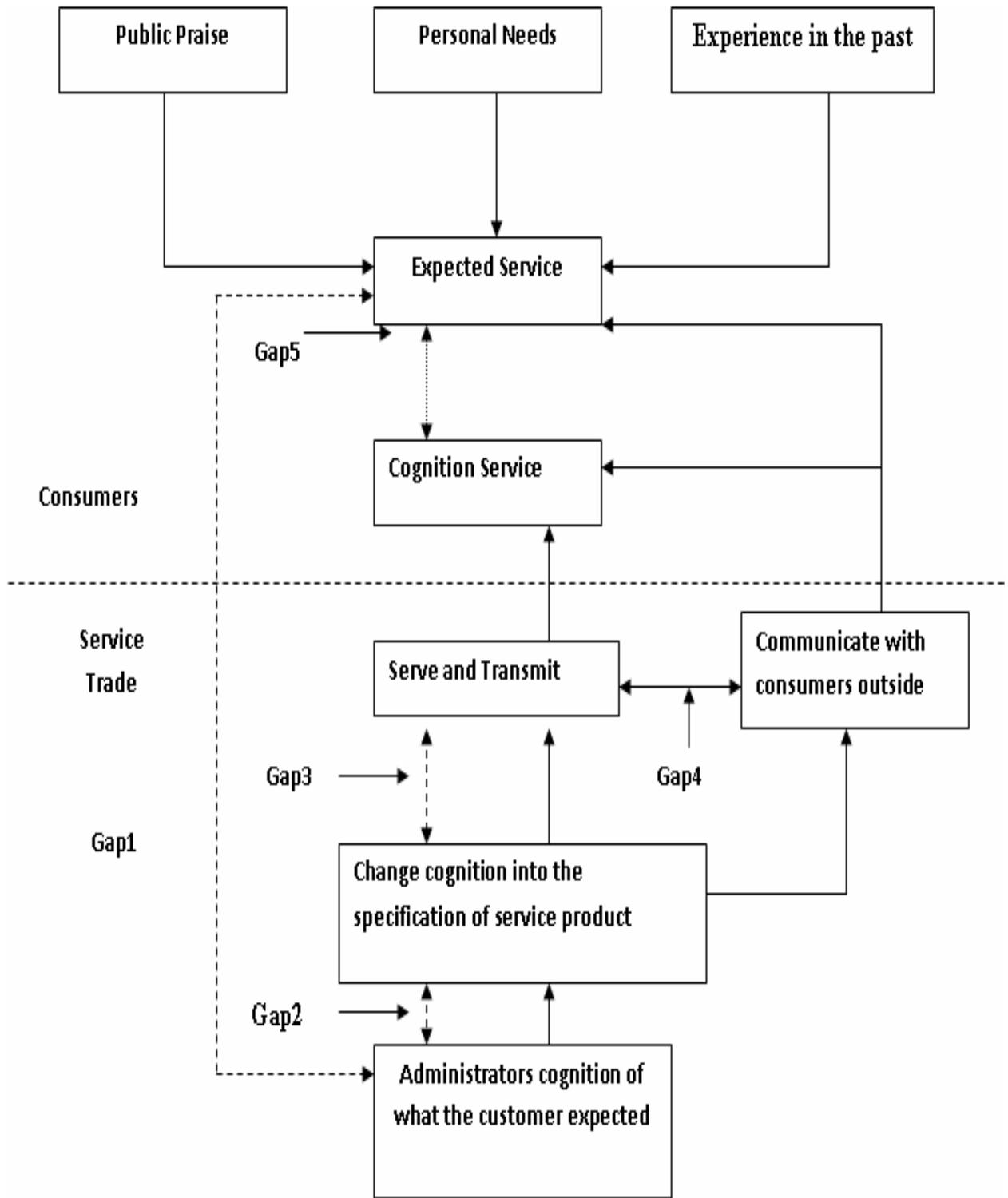


Figure 2-1: Service Quality Model

Parasurman, A., Zeithaml, V.A., and Berry, L.L. (1985)

This figure summarizes the main results related to the study of the concept of service quality and the factor that affect it through a group of gaps illustrated here below:

Gap (1): This is the gap between the customers' expectations and the cognitions of the administration to these expectations . Responsible of service companies do not always do not understand customers' expectations; nor do they know the real characteristics of service order to respond to customers' needs and demands.

Gap (2): This is the gap between the administration cognition of customers' expectations and the transformation of this cognition into the features that affect service quality from the customers' point of view.

Gap (3): It the gap between the features of service quality and the actual service presented to customers.

Gap (4): This gap between the actually presented service and the external communications about service . Such communications affect not only the customers' expectations of service but also their cognition of the actually presented service.

The contrast between the presented service and the external communications of service , as it regards promises and lack of information that affect customers' approval, many influence the customers' cognition of the service quality.

Gap (5): This is the gap between the actually presented service and the realized service. Service quality as realized by the customer depends on the value and direction of this gap which, in turn, depend on the nature of the previous gaps (Parasuraman et al., 1985).

Furthermore, customers evaluate services according to the goal of such service : necessity, importance, results, costs, and adventure. To get appropriate expectations, customers should have a complete image of the goal of service. However, Woodruff (1997) refers to quality as the realized preference of a customer to evaluate the product characteristics, the characteristics of performance, and the consequences which may emerge when goals are not achieved by the customer.

Previous studies help to understand how service quality is measured. Simultaneously one point of criticism against the model of SERVQUAL is that its tool of measurement focuses on the process of service delivery (Richard & Allaway, 1993; Mangold & Babakus, 1991) Yet there is no general agreement about whether the structure of service quality is a concept with multiple dimensions or characteristics.(Gronroos, 1984; Cornin & Taylor, 1992; Parasuraman, et al., 1985, 1988).

Powpaka's study (1996) points out the role of service outcome as a factor that determines the total quality of a group of various service industries. The most outstanding measures of service quality, i.e., SERVQUAL of Parasuraman, et al.,(1985,1988) and SERVPERF of Cornin & Taylor(1992,1994) may not comprehensively sufficient to achieve the structure of service quality since both scales focus on the characteristics of 'process quality' rather than the quality characteristics of 'quality output' .

It is worth mentioning here that the process of evaluating service quality should include all characteristics of quality output and service delivery mentioned by Gronroos (1982, 1984), Mangold & Babakus (1991), and Richard & Allaway (1993). Powpakas study (1996) concludes that the dimension of the quality of service output is a crucial determining factor of total quality; and so existence in the model will improve the explanatory power and predictive validity of the model.

Still, there are many researchers in the field of marketing who try to arrive at determining the elements/ components of the dimension of technical quality as it is widely accepted that this very dimension affects customers' realization of quality (Gronroos,1984) and (Powpaka,1996).

Service Quality and Tourism

In general tourism is as good as the quality of service provided by the players in the industry. This is because the quality of service in tourism plays an important role in the process of delivery (Wyllie 2000) and thus is the standard used to assess the effectiveness of a particular leisure service agency, including the tourism service sectors(Godbey 1997). In short, for most travel service providers, service quality is an intangible, but crucial area of interest to ensure customers loyalty to be maintained or improved on. As described above, the major service evaluation tool is SERVQUAL model, and Parasuraman et al(1985). have stated that this model could apply to various service contexts. Many tourism researchers use this model to evaluate the quality of services provided in tourism and affiliated industries (Baker & Fesenmaier 1997; Childress & Crompton 1997; Fick & Ritchie 1991; Vogt & Fesenmaier 1995). For example, Mackay (1987) tested SERVQUAL in the Canadian municipal parks, and he identified the same five dimensions as proposed in Parasuraman et al.'s (1985) model (as cited in Crompton et al. 1991). In another study, Brown and Swartz (1989) expanded on SERVQUAL and eventually discovered the discrepancy where service providers fail to comprehend the level at which customers evaluate their experiences. In contradiction to Brown and Swartz's findings, Bigne et al. (2003), who have also employed SERVQUAL to test the quality of service received from travel agencies, discovered that SERVQUAL is still a valid and reliable model to evaluate the service quality provided by travel agencies. On the whole, some other researchers discovered that even though SERVQUAL was designed to measure service quality, it provides only a framework and thus has had to be adapted and modified to evaluate specific services (Parasuraman et al. 1988, 1991; Beckman & Velfkamp 1995).

Conclusions

This paper has tried to examine the concept of quality as a philosophy that leads tourism management when taking decision related to tourism services as well as determining service quality improvements' requirements useful to tourism services in Jordan. The conclusions of this study For improving tourism service quality it is important to get two necessities: Internal customer satisfaction and external customer satisfaction. And For quality improvements it is necessary to be a creative business environment which supports the worker latest ideas and their participating in building a correct decision processes. And this study It is necessary to be a large variety of empowerment to give the worker the opportunity to perform positively according to the situation he/she faces in tourism competitive markets. In the case of Jordan it is important to reorganize tourism business sector to be a type of assistance between tourism enterprises such as strategic alliances in the field of information technology, planned marketing, etc. Business background in the Jordanian tourism sector still has a number of weaknesses that do not carry the internal customer satisfaction for the following reasons: there is no suitable system for encouraging people to be creative and participate in

decision making processes. The weakness of empowerment levels within tourism business enterprises. There is a lot of efforts require to be done for tourism service quality development in Jordanian areas of infrastructure services, the security conditions, growing awareness, and the transportation quality, and It is important to be a useful system for designing efficient quality control measures in the areas of food and beverages, safety tourism actions. Finally this study it is important to be a type of assistance between tourism government and private sector in the fields of tourism product safety and tourism crisis management for improving tourism service quality in Jordan.

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