Measuring Service Quality at Five Stars Hotels in Jordan

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Abstract

Service quality plays a significant role in the success of hotel business. It is vital for hotel managers to have good understanding customers' needs. Identifying the specific expectations of customers, the dimensions of service quality, and their relative importance for customers for each specific segment of hotel industry would definitely help managers face the challenge of improving the service quality. This study attempts to investigate the service quality expectations of hotels customers, examine whether the quality dimensions included in the SERVQUAL model apply in an international environment, search for any additional dimensions that should be included in the service quality construct, and measure the level of importance of each specific dimension for the hotels customers.

Keyword: Hotels Industry; Service Quality; Jordan

Introduction

In most industries, the success of a service provider is dependent on the high quality relationships with customers (Panda, 2003). The service competition , the saturation of the markets , the soaring costs of promotional tools, and the changes in social norms, the rising customer expectations have all stimulated an active interest in service quality, customer satisfaction(Jones, 2002).

Within the service sector, significant measures have been implemented to enable the hotel industries to respond more efficiently and effectively to consumer for better quality service. The measures implemented in the financial sector have fostered a more competitive environment and have enable financial institutions to leverage more effectively on technology, economies of scale and operating synergies. This process has contributed towards market efficiencies that will continue to drive down costs and involve into a more diverse and efficient system that meets the needs of consumers, businesses and ultimately the economy (Source:http://www.pmo.gov.my).

Delivering service quality to customers is essential for success and survival in today's competitive hotel environment. The provision of services of high quality enhances reputation, improves customer loyalty, attracts new customers through word of mouth and increases financial performance and profitability. Research has shown repeatedly the service quality influence many important organizational outcomes such as performance superiority (Portela and Thanassoulis; 2006), increasing sales, profit (Levesque and McDougall, 1996; Kish, 2000; Duncan and Elliot, 2002) promoting word of mouth (Fisher, 2001) and promote customer loyalty (Caruana, 2002; Ehigie, 2006).

In conclusion, to survive in this highly competitive hotel industry, it is apparent that the hotels need to provide customers with high quality service (Levesque and McDougall,

1996). In line with this, hotels like any organization need accurate measure of service quality to assure their continued survival and success. hotels managers are first required to understand the attributes customers use to judge service quality. Then, steps need be taken to monitor and enhance the service performance.

Measuring service quality in the hotel industry

In recent years, numerous studies have focused on service quality in the hotel industry (e.g., Juwaheer, 2004; Ekinci et al., 2003; Tsang and Qu, 2000; Mei et al., 1999). The outcomes of these studies have produced several contributions in relation to understanding the dimensional structure of service quality of hotels. At the same time, these studies have proved that there might have been different quality dimensions to deal with for the hotels that serve to different markets and thus fall into different segments of the hotel industry such as, resort hotels, motels, airport hotels, convention hotels, etc. which all have distinguishing characteristics. These studies have also shown that, in hotel setting, some of quality dimensions were different from the five dimensions described by the original SERVQUAL researchers. Akan (1995) prepared a questionnaire adapted from the SERVQUAL instrument and investigated the application of the SERVQUAL instrument in an international environment. The author aimed to examine the dimensions of the SERVQUAL and measure the level of importance of the dimensions for the users of Turkish four- and five-star hotels. The study identified seven dimensions, named as ''courtesy and competence of the personnel'', ''communication and transactions'', ''tangibles'', ''knowing and understanding the customer'', ''accuracy and speed of service'', ''solutions to problems'', and ''accuracy of hotel reservations''. Among these, ''courtesy and competence of hotel personnel'' was the most important attribute influencing the perception of quality.

Research Objective

The objective of this paper is to develop a reliable and valid stander scale for the measurement of perceived quality in five stars hotels service, in general . the current study aims to provide insights into the service quality in the context of hotel industry. The specific objectives of this study are:
  1- To examine the key dimensions of hotel service quality
  2- To examine the level of importance of each specific dimension for the users of   the business hotels' services

The SERVQUAL scale

The previously mentioned criteria constitute the base for the service quality since they express the items which represent the different aspects for the ten dimensions necessary for the purpose of forming the primary or initial items of the questionnaire, the tool of measuring service quality. The abbreviated tom: 'SERVQUAL' is used stand for these items. It was Parasuraman,et,al., (1985) who first put the first issues of this tool of measuring service quality. The tool consists of a 97 tom questionnaire in which every two

expression stand for one item. One expression is used to measure 'expectations'; and the other measures 'perception' . The difference in the degree of each item results in quality of the realized service.

This questionnaire is developed by the same writers in 1988 to become a revised issue with 22 Paris and to represent the five dimensions given below:

- Reliability; the ability to offer the promised service in an educate and confident way.
- Responsiveness: the desire to help customers and offer immediate service.
- Assurance: the knowledge, courtesy and capability of officer to show their confidence in themselves and in others.
- Empathy: the individual care and concern the organization offers to its customers.
- Tangibles: material utilities, equipments, and appearance of officers.
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Researchers' conceder SERVQUAL as the point of start but not as the final answer to evaluated and improves service quality.

As For the research works of Cronin and Taylor (1992), they spread doubt of the reliability of the SERVQUAL presented by Parasuraman,et;al., in 1985,1988and 1991. The two researchers wonder whether customers are able to evaluate service quality through performance and expectation. They conclude that service quality must be measured as a direction thinking that service quality is influenced by the performance of realized service only. To prove their hypothesis, they examine four models of service quality measurement:

-SERVQUAL: service quality=performance-expectations

-Weighted SERVQUAL: service quality=importance (of performance and expectations)

-SERVPERF: service quality =performance

-Weighted SERVPERF: service quality=importance of performance.

We arrive at the conclusion that SERVPERF is applied to measure the service quality realized by customer; and is found effective as compared with SERVQUAL since it is structured on the base of performance and since it reduce the number of items to be measured to 50%(i.e., from 44 to 22). Moreover, the twenty two items are found to give results much better than those of SERVQUAL. One more feature of this measurement is that it is easy to apply as it focuses on measuring the actual performance of service.

Despite the criticisms leveled at the scale, SERVQUAL is still regarded as a leading measure of service quality (Lam and Woo, 1997;Mittal and Lassar, 1996). For this reason, in this study the SERVQUAL instrument was used as a tool of analysis.

Service quality Gap

The figure below 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 the y know he 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 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 lake 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.
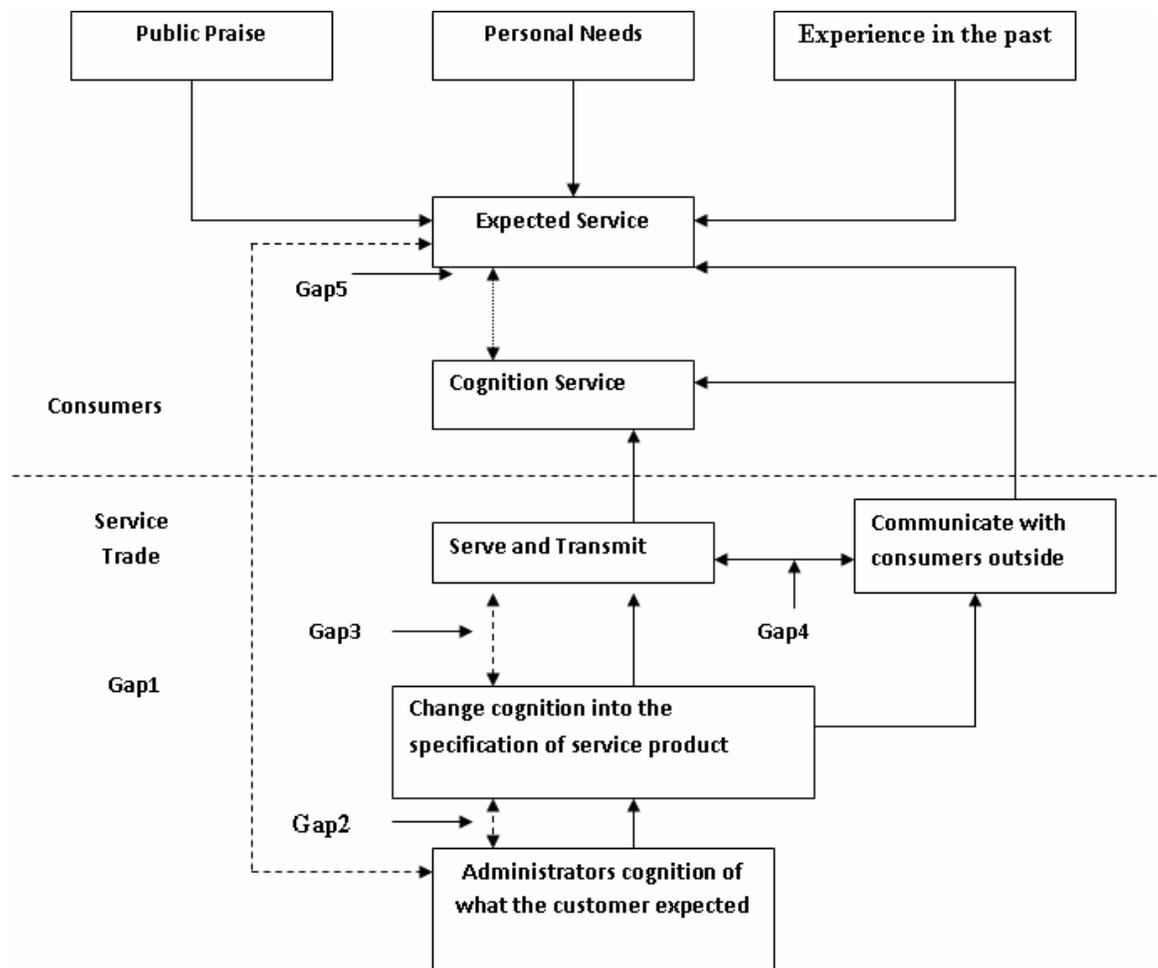

Figure 1: Service Quality Model

Research Design

This study is characterized as a descriptive and analytic work since it aims at realizing the extent of the measuring quality of tourist service of the five star hotels in Jordan . The methodology of this study includes the following:

1- The statistical data and literature related with the quality of service, and the factor which may affect the loyalty and satisfaction of customers.
2- A field -survey of a sample of tourists resident in the five star hotels in Jordan
3- This study will be achieved through a special questionnaire made for this purpose.
4- A self-administered questionnaire, an adapted/modified version of SERVQUAL, will be used in this study to analyze the service quality expectations and perceptions of the hotel's guests.

Conclusion

Identifying accurately the specific expectations of customers, the dimensions of the service quality around which customers make their quality evaluations, and their relative importance for customers carries vital importance in quality improvement efforts (Asubonteng et al., 1996). Having knowledge about these areas would definitely help managers in the challenge of improving the service quality in the hotel industry. From this point of view, obtaining specific knowledge about these areas for the hotel segments that show differences with regard to the clientele they serve, the services they offer, and the cultural context from which the hotel generates its customers would create more satisfying outcomes in quality efforts.

This study identified five service quality dimensions that represent the evaluative criteria customers use to assess service quality of the business hotels named as ''tangibles'', ''empathy'', ''responsiveness '',''assurance'', and ''reliable ''.

This study will contribute to the theoretical and methodological advancement of service quality and hotel industry literature by analyzing some pivotal service quality issues in a specific class of accommodation.

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