

Service Quality Dimensions Shaping Customer Satisfaction in the Hotel Industry of Bangladesh: A Study in Chattogram

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Abstract

Bangladesh is an emerging economy and Chattogram is the most important city considering its economic contribution to the nation, and as such, it is not at all surprising that Chattogram is considered the ‘Commercial Capital’ of Bangladesh. This paper accentuates on the hotel industry of Chattogram and attempts to uncover the role of service quality elements in shaping tourist/customer satisfaction in the hotel industry. Keeping this objective in mind, three different star-category hotels have been selected including Hotel Agrabad, Peninsula, and Radisson Blu Chattogram Bay View. The focus of the study has been confined to unveiling the customer/guest/tourist perception of the service quality provided by the selected hotels. Mean and Gap Analysis have been measured for each of the selected hotels to reveal the guest / customer perception of five service quality dimensions (tangibles, reliability, assurance, responsiveness, and empathy). Based on the observations, a number of measures have been recommended for the hotels to improve their service quality.

Keywords

Service quality, customer satisfaction, hotel industry, Bangladesh

Introduction

Customer satisfaction and service quality are interrelated elements in the hospitality sector (Oh, 1999; Keshavarz & Jamshidi, 2018). The benchmark of success in the service oriented industries is customer service excellence (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, Berry, & Berry, 1990). Customers respond positively to the proper provision of services (Lockwood & Pyun, 2019). Service quality is an important requirement for the creation of customer loyalty (Caruana, 2002; Ladhari, 2009; Lu, Berchoux, Marek, & Chen, 2015) and a number of studies (Mersha & Adlakha, 1992; Richard & Allaway, 1993; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996; Caruana, 2002; Hennig-Thurau, 2004) determine that a

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link exists between customer satisfaction and service quality. Customer satisfaction and service are important elements of competitive advantage (Barsky & Labagh, 1992; Iacobucci, Ostrom, & Grayson, 1995; Tam, 2004) and in the contemporary scenario of intense market competition customer satisfaction is the only baseline (Hu, Kandampully, & Juwaheer, 2009). Service attributes are important determinants of customer satisfaction (Mayer, Ehrhart, & Schneider, 2009) and both service attributes and customer satisfaction influence the purchase behavior of the customers (Tarn, 1999). The assessment of service quality attributes enables hotels to make important decisions on specific areas for improvement (Yang, Jou, & Cheng, 2011). Customer satisfaction is stated to exert a positive influence on the corporate image (Hu, Kandampully, & Juwaheer, 2009), whereas hotel image in turn can be a positive factor for building customer loyalty (Lai, 2019).

Although the hotel industry is regarded as being important to the national economy, there is a lack of in-depth studies on customer satisfaction determinants in the hospitality industry of the nation. While there exists an informal agreement that service quality, as it is understood in the context of a service-oriented enterprise, is an important component of the hotel industry, the importance of service quality as the benchmark of performance in the hotel industry in the local scenario is yet to be definitively examined. The current paper attempts to partially address this gap through evaluating the elements of service quality as it relates to customer satisfaction in three selected hotels of Chattogram, which are respectively Hotel Agrabad, Peninsula, and Radisson Blu Chattogram Bay View. The first section of the paper is the introduction. The second section contains the literature review, while the third section discusses the objectives of the study, and the fourth section of the paper discusses the scope and methodology. The fifth and sixth sections of the paper highlight the findings and analysis, and the gap analysis of the paper respectively. The seventh and eighth sections of the paper discuss the recommendations and concluding remarks of the paper.

Literature Review

Hospitality Industry

Hospitality is one of the oldest professions and a powerful economic activity (Ottenbacher, Harrington, & Parsa, 2009). The hospitality industry is acknowledged as one of the most dynamic service industries in present times (Walker & Walker, 2004; Barrows & Powers, 2008). Globalization will have a significant impact on all aspects of the hospitality industry (Jin-zhao & Jing, 2009). Innovation is stated to be an important determinant of success in the hospitality industry (Ottenbacher, 2007), a viewpoint echoed earlier by Ottenbacher and Gnoth (2005), stated later in a subsequent paper (Wikhamn, 2019). Service is acknowledged as an important aspect of the hotel industry (Shaw, Bailey, & Williams, 2011). Hemmington (2007) correctly points out that hospitality is

more than the management of services, and must create a meaningful experience for its customers. Customer satisfaction is the main indicator for evaluation of the services provided to the customers (Pizam & Ellis, 1999) and customer satisfaction in turn is stated to facilitate the creation of customer loyalty (Bowen & Chen, 2001), a viewpoint stated differently in an earlier study (Innis & La Londe, 1994), and later confirmed in a subsequent paper (El-Adly, 2019). Hospitality companies can achieve more growth by increasing their brand loyal customers (Tepeci, 1999) and revitalization of service quality can help in the creation of customer satisfaction and loyalty (Akbar, Som, Wadood, & Alzaidiyeen 2010; Lu et al., 2015; Islam, Hollebeek, Rahman, Khan, & Rasool, 2019). Loyalty is stated to be the most important strategic aim in the hotel industry (Keshavarz & Jamshidi, 2018).

Attributes of Service Quality

This sub-section of the literature review explains the main aspects of service quality in the hotel industry and five dimensions developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988), and further discussed by Berry, Parasuraman and Zeithaml (1988) and Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1993).

- 1. Tangibles** - the physical facilities, equipment and employees appearance. This dimension refers to the facilities, equipment and material which must reflect positively on the organization. According to Wake field and Blodgett (1999), the tangible aspects of service delivery have a strong impact on the customers' perception of service quality and the willingness to recommend, and quality of the physical environment is important for increasing customer satisfaction (Han & Hyun, 2017).
- 2. Responsiveness** - the willingness to help and respond to customer needs. Organizations ought to be receptive to the moving or shifting needs of their clients and giving courses and preparing programs that are important to the business. Responsiveness is an important component of service quality (Lahap, O'mahony, & Dalrymple, 2016). Responsiveness is the willingness to assist customers and to provide prompt service on a continuous basis. This dimension focuses on attentiveness and willingness in dealing with customer requests, queries and prompt complaint resolution. Responsiveness to customers is stated to be important in dealing with demanding customers and market competitiveness (Nazarian, Atkinson, & Foroudi, 2017).
- 3. Reliability** - the ability to perform service dependably and accurately. Some organizations tend to oversell their services, prompting them to 'fabulous' guarantees that distort their genuine potential. The organizations must provide the client with the precise service it suggests through advertising and it must convey what is guaranteed in a particular time period set out within the specified time frame. If service delivery is done in a proper manner, it will enhance the perceived quality that the customer experiences.

4. Assurance – the ability of employees to inspire confidence and trust. Judgment of high or low service quality largely depends on how the customers perceive the actual performance based on their expectation. Quality assurance is connected to customer service and that terrible service offered to clients bring about disappointment or dissatisfaction. Best or guaranteeing quality realizes consumer loyalty and additionally client retention.

5. Empathy – the extent to which caring individualized service is given. It is at times a challenge for organizations to surpass client desires and request. For example, deficiencies of employees at the hotel and the requirement for best service and occasion facilitating have seen an expansion in sizes, extending the stuff-customer. This expanded proportion has implications on the level of individual consideration and compassion given to each client.

SERVQUAL is a vehicle for gaining customers' knowledge of service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). It is a multidimensional scale. The scale first was published in 1988 and has undergone numerous improvements and revisions since then. The questionnaire consists of matched pairs of items; 22 expectation items and 22 perceptions items, organized into five dimensions which are believed to align with the consumer's mental map of service quality dimensions. Both the expectations component and the perceptions component of the questionnaire consist a total of 22 items, comprising 4 items to capture tangibles, 5 items to capture reliability, 4 items for responsiveness, 4 items for assurance, and 5 items to capture empathy.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this paper is to gain a critical understanding of the elements of customer satisfaction in the hotel industry of Bangladesh through the selected hotels in Chattogram.

The specific objectives of the paper are stated as follows:

1. To gain an understanding about customer services in the selected hotels of Chattogram.
2. To find the level of customer satisfaction among the selected hotels.
3. To know about the customer perceptions regarding the service quality of the selected hotels.
4. To understand the gap between customer perception and expectation of service quality of the selected hotels.

Scope and Methodology

The data used in the statistical analysis for the paper has been collected through a structured close-ended questionnaire handed out to 25 guests (customers) of each of the selected hotels making the total to 75. A combination of primary and secondary data was applied for the statistical analysis of the paper. The respondents were selected through a convenience random

sampling process, since the focus of the paper is very specific. Before making actual contact with the guests, verbal authorization was obtained from the hotel authorities and the 75 sampled respondents as well. Secondary data have been collected from the websites of the selected hotels, and the literature has been compiled from textbooks and peer reviewed journal articles.

The level of customer satisfaction was taken on a five-point scale from 1 to 5, depending on the scale of the satisfaction. For example, “very satisfied” was given 5 followed by “satisfied” with value 4, “not decided” with 3, “dissatisfied” with 2, and “very dissatisfied” with a value of 1. The perception of the selected respondents was also taken on a five-point scale from 1 to 5, depending on the scale of agreement attached to each statement. For example, “strongly agree” was given 5 followed by “agree” with value 4, “hard to agree” with 3, “disagree” with 2, and “strongly disagree” with a value of 1. Expectations of the sample respondents regarding various dimensions of service quality were collected by changing the statement with the word “should”. For example, to understand the expectation of the sample respondents regarding first statement, the statement was further placed before the same respondent in this changed form, “when your hotel promises to do something by a certain time, it should do so.” Thus the questionnaire had a total of 42 statements; 21 statements to collect perception and another 21 statements to collect expectations. Based on the aims and objectives of the paper, the authors have applied the statistical mean and gap analysis to examine the data collected from the respondents. The mean represents a generalized viewpoint of the attributes of service quality, whereas the gap analysis pinpoints the gaps between the customers’ perceptions and the actual provision of the service.

Findings and Analysis

Customer Satisfaction Regarding Service Quality

The level of customer satisfaction is an important indicator for measuring the capability of the service provider. Customers can compare their satisfaction levels when they avail services from more than one provider. Therefore, the customer satisfaction scores can be used to measure the capability of the service provider.

Table 1: *Mean Score of Customer Satisfaction*

Hotels	Satisfaction Score
Agrabad	4.75
RBCBV	4.44
Peninsula	4.63

The customer satisfaction scores show that the customers of the selected hotels have an overall high level of satisfaction with the service provided by the

hotels. Hotel Agrabad displays the highest satisfaction score, with Radisson showing the lowest score among the selected hotels. Overall, it is observed that the variation within the satisfaction scores is minimal.

Customer Expectations Regarding Service Quality

Customer expectation is the standard or reference point against which the performance of the service provider is evaluated. Customers compare their perceptions of performance with this reference point when evaluating service quality. Therefore in order to judge the performance of the hotels regarding service quality it is important to have a quantitative assessment of customers' expectations.

Table 2: Mean Score of Customers' Expectation

Hotels	Reliability	Responsiveness	Assurance	Empathy	Tangibles	Aggregate
Agrabad	4.64	4.61	5.00	4.69	4.06	4.60
RBCBV	4.76	4.45	5.00	4.83	4.31	4.63
Peninsula	4.72	4.20	5.00	4.86	4.25	4.54
Average	4.70	4.42	5.00	4.79	4.20	4.59

Customer Perceptions Regarding Service Quality

Service quality should be discussed on the basis of customers' perception of the service, not on the basis of some predetermined objectives or criteria of what service is or should be. Customers' perception of the service is an important determinant of customers' satisfaction.

Table 3: Score of Perception Regarding Service Quality

Hotels	Reliability	Responsiveness	Assurance	Empathy	Tangibles	Aggregate
Agrabad	3.73 R-2	3.58 R-1	3.63 R-3	3.62 R-2	3.86 R-3	3.68 R-2
RBCBV	3.90 R-1	3.50 R-2	3.83 R-2	3.18 R-3	4.19 R-1	3.72 R-1
Peninsula	3.45 R-3	3.50 R-2	3.95 R-1	3.49 R-1	3.87 R-2	3.65 R-3
Average	3.69	3.53	3.80	3.43	3.97	3.68

Table 3 above shows the comparative position of the selected hotels from the viewpoint of customers' perception regarding service quality. Ranking of the hotels has been done on the basis if the score of each dimension as well as on the basis of aggregate score.

Service Quality and Satisfaction

To determine which element of service quality has a more close relationship with customer satisfaction, the study compares the satisfaction scores (Table 1) with the perception scores of service quality (Table 3). The comparison shows that in terms of the aggregate scores, the lowest gap exists for Radisson (0.72), followed by Peninsula (0.98) and Agrabad (1.12).

In terms of the dimension-wise scores, the tangibles dimension are related prominently with customer satisfaction for Hotel Agrabad and Raddison, while the assurance dimension is prominently related with customer satisfaction for Peninsula. Therefore, it can be stated that the tangibles and assurance dimension of service quality are important predictors of customer satisfaction within the selected hotels of the study.

Ranking on the basis of Aggregate Service Quality Score

Aggregate service quality score of RBCBV is the highest among the hotels. But the score (3.72) does not indicate whether the customers' perception of the service quality of the hotel is good enough. To be good the score should be at least 4. The reason why the hotel is in better position is because their customer base is very small and they work with a limited number of corporate clients, which puts them in a better position to satisfy their customers. As there is no such rush in the hotel and because of an excellent tangibility spectrum, the hotel is perceived to be the best in overall ranking in the eyes of the customers. On the other hand, aggregate service quality score of Agrabad is 3.68, which is relatively low. The service quality score is somewhere in between "Hard to Agree" and "Agree". Finally the overall score of Peninsula is the lowest compared to the others. The reason may be due to more number of customers in these hotels compared to others, less number of employees, less facilities compared to others, more waiting time in the line, higher fee structure etc.

Dimension Wise Comparison of Perception of the Sample Hotels

Reliability: In the reliability dimension RBCBV is perceived as the most reliable hotel, followed by Agrabad, which has a lower score in comparison RBCBV. Peninsula has got the lowest score and subsequently the lowest rank in the reliability dimension. This indicates that in providing services right the first time, at the time when it is promised and also informing the customers regarding when the service will be performed RBCBV is perceived as the most reliable in comparison to the other selected hotels. Peninsula has the lowest most score in reliability dimension compared to the other two hotels, and this may be attributed to a lower motivation level of the employees who are unable to deliver the service when it is promised.

Responsiveness: In the responsiveness dimension all the hotels have exhibited a low score that is the customers' perception of quality for all these hotels in

this dimension is low. RBCBV and Peninsula both have the same score, whereas Agrabad has a slightly higher score. This situation proves that employees of these hotels are not that much willing to help the customers and don't want to provide prompt service and most of the time they are busy to respond towards the customer's request. It is understood from the observation that these multinational hotels are very much worried about their cost structure. All the time they are trying to increase their customer base without increasing the number of workers. Therefore sometimes the employees find it tough to deliver prompt service. Moreover they need to handle numerous amount of job at the same time, which they cannot do quickly and therefore are not able to provide prompt services.

Assurance: Customers perceive that the sample hotels have a better service quality in the assurance dimension and all the hotels do have relatively a better score in this dimension. Customers have the tendency of comparing the service with other service providers in the same industry and then create a perception on the basis of that comparison. This is the reason why in assurance dimension all the hotels have a better score. There is no doubt in the minds of the consumers that the employees of the sample hotels are courteous and more knowledgeable than the local hotels operating in Bangladesh. As far as safety is concerned, these multinational hotels are transparent in their activity and transactions.

Empathy: In the empathy dimension it is found that all the hotels have relatively a low score. Once again the reason is a high customer employee ratio. Boundary spanners are not able to provide individual attention to each and every customer.

Tangibles: The highest aggregate score among all the hotels and also highest individual score is in this particular dimension. This indicates that the hotels' commitment in sincerity, in improving the physical settings and outlook of the service landscape. One important observation that may be mentioned here is that the hotels put such a high level of importance in improving their service landscape which creates a higher expectation level of the customers in other dimensions and eventually a lower perception from the customer's point of view.

Gap Analysis

In the earlier section, hotel performance regarding service quality has been analyzed on the basis of customers' perception. But to understand customers' satisfaction level it needs to be compared with customer's expectation. Most of the time what is expected and what is actually delivered are not the same. When customer expectation exceeds the actual delivery of the service, the difference between perception and expectation (P-E) is referred to as "Gap". A larger gap indicates greater customer dissatisfaction. Service providers should

try to reduce the gap, if any, to achieve significantly higher levels of customer satisfaction and create a robust customer base.

Setting higher expectation level and maintaining inferior service quality are the leading causes of a wider gap between perception and expectation. Therefore to reduce the gap, the marketers can follow the following strategies: (1) Setting a lower level of expectation and (2) Improving the service quality. It is risky for a service provider to reduce the expectation level as customers might identify it as a low quality service provider, as a result not many consumers would be willing to buy the service. On the other hand, service providers should never over-promise as it helps to create a higher expectation level and consequently a bigger gap, which may prove to be detrimental in the long term. Therefore service providers should be very careful in setting the right expectation level.

Table 4: *Gap between Perception and Expectation (P-E)*

Hotels	Reliability	Responsiveness	Assurance	Empathy	Tangibles	Aggregate
Agrabad	-0.91	-1.03	-1.37	-1.07	-0.20	0.92
RBCBV	-0.86	-0.95	-1.17	-1.65	-0.12	0.91
Peninsula	-1.27	-0.70	-1.05	-1.37	-0.38	0.89
Average	-1.01	-0.89	-1.20	-1.36	-0.23	0.91

Table 4 shows that the lowest gap exists in Peninsula, which indicates the highest customer satisfaction among the three sample hotels. But in the earlier section, Peninsula was identified as the lowest performing hotel on the basis of customers' perception. The highest level of satisfaction is the result of a lower expectation of the Peninsula customers. So it is proved that customers' perception is not the only means of judging the customers' satisfaction level. From the viewpoint of aggregate gaps all the hotels are very close to each other. So the customer satisfaction levels among the sample hotels do not have a high degree of variation.

It is further determined that all hotels are concerned with the tangibles dimension of service quality. The average gap in this dimension is the lowest (-0.23) as there were low customer expectation and high customers' perception. Conversely the gap in the empathy dimension is the highest (-1.36). It is the general norm of the customers to seek individual attention as a result expectation in this dimension was higher but the sample hotels were unable to deliver the services accordingly.

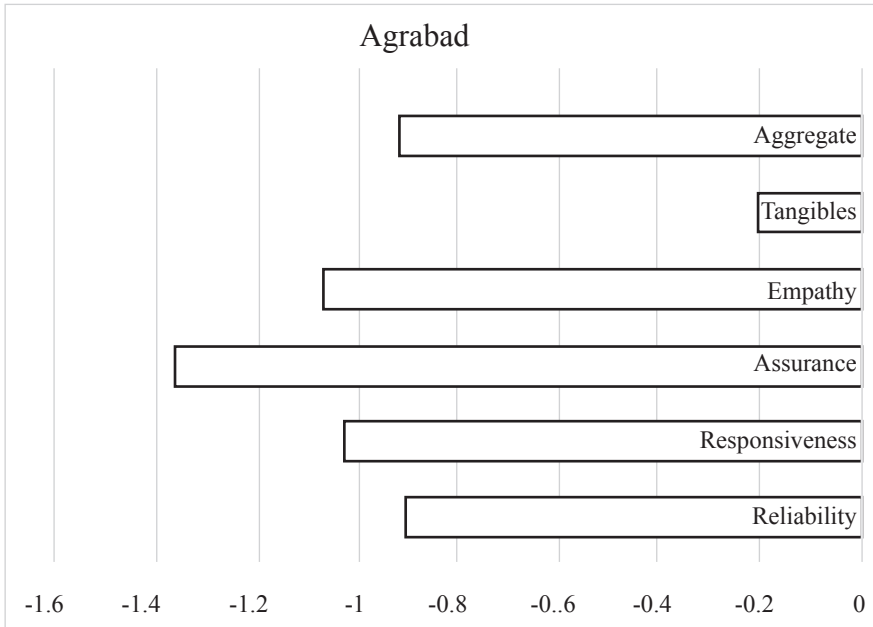


Figure 1. Gap (P-E) of AGRABAD in various dimensions

Figure 1 shows that the lowest gap is in the tangible dimension which confirms that the hotel provides best service in this dimension in comparison to the other hotels in the selection. On the other hand, highest gap was observed in assurance dimension, which shows the lack of delivering and meeting the customers' expectation in this dimension.

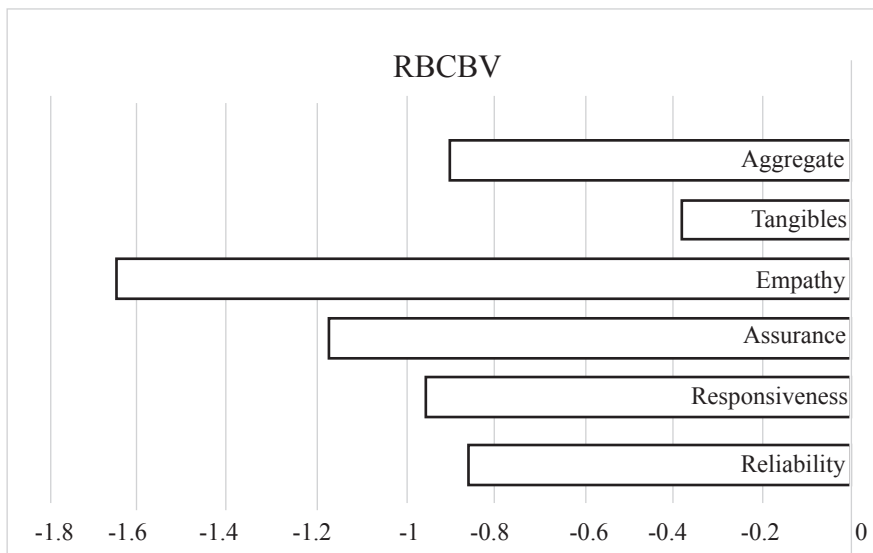


Figure 2. Gap (P-E) of RBCBV in various dimensions

Figure 2 shows that like the other hotels in the selection, RBCBV couldn't meet the desired expectation of their customers in any of the dimensions. But they came very close in meeting the customers' expectation in the tangibles dimension. On other hand, in the empathy dimension they are significantly behind in meeting the customer expectation.

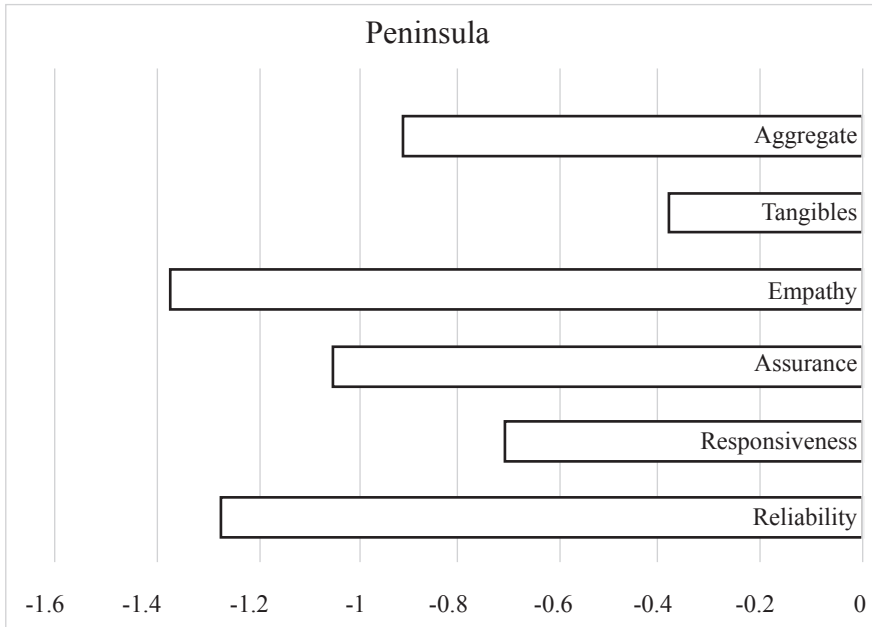


Figure 3. Gap (P-E) of PENINSULA in various dimensions

Figure 3 demonstrates that Peninsula also failed to meet the customers' expectation in all dimensions. Highest shortfall was recorded in the empathy dimension. The lowest shortfall was recorded in the tangibles dimension.

Recommendations

The findings and gap analysis of the study has revealed a number of areas for improvement in the service quality of the selected hotels. The identification of the areas for improvement form the basis of the recommendations as follows:

1. Employees of the hotels should be trained effectively so that they understand the importance of all the identified dimensions of service quality. Extensive training should be organized to develop superior standard in delivering service in all dimensions. It was found that all of these hotels maintain a very low score in the empathy dimension. To overcome this limitation sample hotels should evaluate both the technical service quality and interactive service quality at the time of the employee selection.
2. Hotels should be cautious in terms of their marketing communications with customers. The hotels should be alert in identifying the right positioning strategy for them. They should always try to create the right image through they should ensure their front line service personnel to deliver the same.

3. These hotels should conduct periodic market research to understand the expectations and perceptions of their customers.
4. Their customers should be segmented on the basis of their transactions with the hotel. These hotels should clearly identify the “profitable segments” and provide superior customer service to them. They should also identify the “problem customers” and get rid of them as soon as possible, because they are causing problems to the overall service of the hotel.
5. The management should motivate the boundary spanners because they are the service, in the eyes of the customers. A sustainable pay package, bonuses, yearly picnic programs, incentives for retaining the customers, family day, etc. can be arranged to boost up the loyalty and commitment of the employees.
6. The employees should be empowered with the authority to make instant decisions in the event of an emergency. However, the employees should be trained and clearly specified how much authority they are provided with.

Customers should be treated equally and fairly, because their perception regarding service providers depends on how they are treated compared to the other customers.

Conclusion

The travel and tourism sector contributes towards the economic development of a country, through the influx of foreign currency, and increasing competition in the local markets of the host nation. The proper provision of hotel services establishes a successful network over the country and increases both human and capital resources. By nature, people are visual beings, and therefore, it is no surprise that the tangibles dimension of service quality, as highlighted by the findings of the paper, figure prominently. However, for long term survival in a growing market of a developing nation with high performance across all major economic indicators, the selected hotels will have to significantly improve the non-tangible dimensions of their service quality as well. Modern service consumers by nature are demanding, and informed of available options, thanks to the prominent spread of technology and social media. Therefore, if a new competitor emerges with the ability to provide excellent quality in terms of the tangible and non-tangible dimensions of hotel service, customer retention and attraction of new customers will become a difficult prospect for the selected hotels.

Therefore, considering the findings of the paper, future research initiatives should have a larger sample of hotels with a more robust statistical model with a larger number of variables to examine in more details the factors which influence the consumers' perception of the tangible and intangible aspects of the service quality in the hotels. The findings of the future research will establish the foundation for more robust policies for the concerned industry.

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