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SERVICE QUALITY OF HOTEL FLATS – EXPERIENCE OF PHILIPINO TOURISTS

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this research is to quantitatively examine the relationship between service quality dimensions on guest satisfaction and thereby on guest loyalty. Survey questionnaire was constructed with 19 service quality items covering five service quality dimensions based on SERVQUAL model, four items on Guest Satisfaction and four items on Guest Loyalty. Data was collected from 144 guests of 10 major hotel flats in Al Buraimi, Oman. Analysis results indicate that all dimensions of service quality significantly impact guest satisfaction. Guest Satisfaction significantly influences Guest Loyalty. Assurance Dimension exerted more influence on guest satisfaction. Managers must focus more on dimensions of Empathy, Reliability, Responsiveness, and Assurance other than tangibility to achieve high degree of guest satisfaction which leads to guest loyalty. This will help the hotels to get a good market share despite the increasing level of competition.

KEYWORDS

service quality, guest satisfaction, guest loyalty.

INTRODUCTION

The hospitality sector is an element of travel and tourism industry and is one of the fastest growing industries that provide the necessary and desirable goods and services to travelers worldwide. Guest satisfaction in the hotel industry is of the top priority for owners and managers; because customized services are one among the most important things when considering a hotel to stay in.

Hospitality could be defined in a broad sense as the service offered to strangers mainly with regards to food and accommodation. This is a service which is to be offered wholeheartedly which includes the cordial relationship between the customer/guest and the service provider/host. According to (Reuland & Cassee, 1983) hospitality could be defined as the harmonious combination of tangible and intangible components comprising of food and beverages to behavior of staff. This is a concept much more than the classical concept of providing food and bed to sleep. In totality, hospitality is a mixture of food/beverage and/or shelter combined with the attitude of the people. (Hepple, Kipps, & Thomson, 1990) concluded that there are four distinct characteristics' of hospitality as follows:

1. It is granted by the host to the guest who is away from home.
2. It includes interaction between the host and the guest.
3. It is a blend of tangible and intangible factors.
4. The host assures the guest security, psychological and physiological comfort.

In the hospitality sector, customers actually consume a blend of products and services. It is inevitable for the hospitality firms to ensure that they provide the guests with the best products and services and also to focus on how these services are provided. In this regard the attitude and behavior of the employees count the most. Because of this reason these two factors are of vital importance to the hospitality sector.

Hospitality industry refers to the group of organizations which provide the food/drink/accommodation service to individuals who are away from their hometown(Dr Benny Chan). Hotels form a very important segment of the hospitality industry. Hotels are establishments run by owners which offer sleeping accommodation to individuals who are ready to pay an amount for the services that they get. Hotels are broadly classified as commercial and non commercial. Commercial accommodations are subdivided into hotels and service apartments. Hotels can be classified into various categories like star hotels, resorts, boutique hotels etc.

Serviced Apartments or Hotel Flats are properties which cater to the customers who would like to stay for a short or an extended period. They usually provide kitchen facilities, shopping services, business services and minimum housekeeping services. These are good accommodation type especially when the guests are more in number belonging to same group. They are relatively cheap compared with star category hotels but offer reasonable services. Since the region is on the development path, it is important for the managers to understand the perceptions of the guests regarding the services they received. Since the tourism sector is intertwined with the hospitality industry of a country it is inevitable to provide high quality services to the guests.

Service quality differentiates the services provided by organizations and is used as a strategic weapon to gain a competitive advantage in the market(Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). Researches have revealed that leading service organizations attempt to sustain a superior quality of service over their competitors in an effort to attain and retain customer loyalty(Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). Service organizations' capability to develop and sustain large and loyal customer base is indispensable for its long term success in the market(Reichheld, 1992). In such a situation organization must pay attention to the concept of service quality.

Quality along with the loyalty of the guests is an important factor that leads to the success of hospitality as well as tourism sector(Alrousan & Abuamoud, 2013). Service quality must be the vital policy to maintain and build customer support and base. Hotels must strive to win customer loyalty by offering enhanced quality services(Kandampully, 2000). Service quality is considered vital for the existence of hotels(Min & Min, 1997). It is the central part of service management(Chen, 2008) and is highly related with customer satisfaction (Shi & Su, 2007) and satisfaction is connected with revisit intention(Han, Back, & Barrett, 2009). Hotel performance is directly related to service quality improvement(Dalal, 2015; Narangajavana & Hu, 2008).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

(Minh, Ha, Anh, & Matsui, 2015) in their research on hotel industry in Vietnam empirically tested the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. The intangible components of service quality exert more influence on customer satisfaction than the tangible component. Among the intangible dimensions, empathy exerted significant impact with higher beta value than other dimension followed by reliability, responsiveness and empathy. The study concluded that service quality plays an important role as a factor influencing high customer satisfaction level in hotel service.

(El Saghier, 2013) in his research on Egyptian hotels found out that service quality dimensions like responsiveness, reliability and empathy weighed more for the customers more than tangibility dimension. More favorable perception on responsiveness dimension indicated stronger satisfaction levels for customers and this finding is of huge managerial implication that employees highly influence the satisfaction level of guests more than the physical infrastructure.

(Dalal, 2015) in his research on service quality on customer satisfaction among the hotels in Uttarakhand area revealed that tangibility is the most crucial dimension followed by assurance, empathy, reliability and lastly responsiveness. This research concluded that customers in industrial area of Uttarakhand attach more importance to the tangibility dimension followed by service assurance.

***(Al-Oguiliy & Khasawneh, 2015*)** in their research investigated the impact of service quality on tourist behavior in four and five stars hotels in Jordan. Responses were collected from the guests regarding their expectations and perceptions regarding the hotel service in Amman, the capital of Jordan. Analysis of the data revealed that the dimensions of service quality had great impact on the level of satisfaction of the guests and their decision to choose the same hotels in the future. About 96.9 % change in the customer satisfaction was attributed to the variable service quality. Tangibility dimension influenced customer satisfaction the most followed by assurance, empathy, responsiveness and reliability.

***(Alrousan & Abuamoud, 2013*)** in their research paper examined the impact of tourism service quality dimension on tourist satisfaction and loyalty in five star hotels of Jordan. Results showed that dimensions of service quality such as empathy, reliability, responsiveness and tangibility considerably forecast customer loyalty. Assurance dimension had more beta value and explanatory power on customer satisfaction followed by tangibility, reliability and responsiveness. Regarding the influence of the service quality dimensions on loyalty intentions, it was revealed that tangibility exerted more influence followed by Empathy, Reliability and Responsiveness. The influence of assurance on loyalty was not supported.

***(Rao & Sahu, 2013*)** in their research on hotel industry of Bhubaneswar, used the Servqual model to analyze the expectations and perceptions gap of service delivery and how it influences customer satisfaction and loyalty. In this study, the findings showed that most respondents identified tangibility as the most important factor in determining satisfaction and their perception of service was more than what they expected. Customers' perception level was higher than their expectation. Thus it was substantiated that Servqual dimensions positively influenced satisfaction and hence loyalty.

***(Markovic & Raspor, 2010*)** examined the customer perception of service quality in the hotel industry of Croatia. The main objective of the study was to determine the perceived service quality of the hotel services and to analyze the satisfaction and loyalty level of tourists. Reliability, empathy and competence of staff, accessibility and tangibles are the key factors that described customers' expectations of hotel service quality.

***(Akbaba, 2006*)** in the study investigated the service quality expectations of business hotels customers, and to examine whether the quality dimensions included in the SERVQUAL model apply in an international environment and evaluate the intensity of significance of specific dimension in Turkey. It was found out that the most important factor in predicting overall service quality was tangibles followed by understanding and caring, adequacy in service supply, assurance and convenience respectively. The findings of the study confirmed the Servqual tool validity and reliability and also established that the service quality is a significant factor in predicting customer satisfaction and thereby loyalty.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

HOSPITALITY SECTOR IN OMAN

Hospitality Sector in Oman is on a growth path. Due to the increased amount of thrust placed on development of tourism, the hospitality sector is on the growth momentum. The hospitality industry in Oman is expected to grow at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 6.2 per cent from 2015 to reach $1 billion in 2020. This growth is mainly due to a 5.3 per cent annual increase in hotels and serviced apartment room supply and a 6.3 per cent increase in international tourist arrivals. Oman government's tourism plan to double tourist arrivals by 2040 by developing tourist spots and encouraging private investments is likely to boost demand. This will lead an increase in tourist arrivals is likely to affect occupancy rates and average daily rates in the Sultanate's hotels and serviced apartments to grow by 1 percentage points and 0.3 per cent CAGR, respectively, during 2015 to 2020. Residential and tourism projects as well as hotels and resorts worth US$10 billion are in process in the Sultanate.

There have been numerous studies in the area of service quality and guest satisfaction. But no studies in particular have focused on hotel flats and its service quality in Oman. This study is a unique attempt to assess the service quality of the hotel flats in Al Buraimi area. Analysis of the service quality components and its impact on guest satisfaction and guest loyalty will provide the hotel management to devise strategies to sustain in the market. Hence this study is initiated.

Since Al Buraimi is on the development path, this study will be vital for the hotel managements'. They can devise strategies to attract more tourists by giving attractive offers and activity packages. Since the hospitality sector is linked with the tourism sector, this study will benefit the tourism sector too. Hence this study is initiated.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

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OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the overall impact of service quality on guest satisfaction:
2. To examine the influence of overall service quality on guest loyalty.
3. To examine the influence of demographics on guest satisfaction.
4. To study the influence of guest satisfaction on guest loyalty.

HYPOTHESES

1. Overall service quality positively impacts guest satisfaction:
    a. Tangibility dimension positively impact guest satisfaction.
    b. Reliability dimension positively impact guest satisfaction
    c. Responsiveness dimension positively impact guest satisfaction
    d. Assurance dimension positively impact guest satisfaction
    e. Empathy dimension positively impact guest satisfaction
2. Demographic factors influence guest satisfaction:
    a. Gender influence guest satisfaction.
    b. Age influence guest satisfaction.
3. Guest satisfaction positively impact guest loyalty.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research follows a descriptive pattern and with the use of quantitative methods the researcher tries to explain the different causal relationships proposed in the model.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The population of the study comprised of the Philipino guests who stayed in hotel flats of Al Buraimi. The sampling design employed in the research is convenience sampling. The sample size for the study comprised of 144 respondents.

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The questionnaire comprised of four different sections. First part of the questionnaire deal with the demographics of the respondents. Second part comprise of the experienced service quality. Third part deal with guest satisfaction and fourth part deals with guest loyalty. The questions on experienced service quality, guest satisfaction and guest loyalty are measured on a five point Likert Scale (from 1 – strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree).

TOOLS FOR ANALYSIS

Data was entered and analyzed using SPSS -21. Tools such as Frequency Distributions, Percentage distributions, t test, multiple regression, ANOVA, SEM etc. are used to analyze the data.

CONSTRUCTS AND SOURCES

The constructs used in this research has been framed from the following sources.

TABLE 1: QUESTIONNAIRE SOURCES

Variable	*Nos. of Item*	*Source*
Service Quality	19	Minh et.al (2015)
Guest Satisfaction	4	Oliver(1991)
Guest Loyalty	4	Oliver (1991),Kim(2010)

MEASUREMENT OF RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Analysis of the questionnaire started with testing the reliability of the constructs used in the study. Cronbach alpha is the commonly used technique to ensure the internal consistency and reliability of the measurement too. The calculated Cronbach alpha for all the dimensions is above the threshold level of 0.6(Nunnally, Bernstein, & Berge, 1967). Hence the study proceeded.

TABLE 2: RELIABILITY VALUES

No	Item	No of Items	Cronbach Alpha
1	Tangibility	6	0.73
2	Responsiveness	3	0.65
3	Reliability	3	0.60
4	Assurance	4	0.60
5	Empathy	3	0.71
6	Guest Satisfaction	4	0.73
7	Guest Loyalty	4	0.70

Validity of the instrument was tested by content validity and construct validity. Validity ensures that the measurement tool actually caters to the need for which it is devised for. Content Validity of the questionnaire is ensured through literature review. The primary source for the questionnaire being the Servqual tool developed by (Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml, 1991). The Servqual tool was used by many researchers in their studies on hotel service quality (Akbaba, 2006; Al-Oguiliy & Khasawneh, 2015; Alrousan & Abuamoud, 2013; Coyle & Dale, 1993). The present research utilizes the questionnaire proposed by(Minh et al., 2015) which is developed utilizing SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1988), LODGQUAL (Knutson, Stevens, Wullaert, Patton, & Yokoyama, 1990), HOLSERV(Wong Ooi Mei, Dean, & White, 1999) and LQI(Getty & Getty, 2003).

Construct Validity is checked using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The count value of the items included in the questionnaire were more than the Pearson R table Product moment at 5% significance level with p=0.000 ensuring the validity of the items included in the questionnaire. The KMO and Bartlett's Test obtained a value of 0.845 with a significance level of 0.000 ensuring that the data collected is sufficient enough for factor analysis. Factor analysis revealed that the five factors had Eigen values more than one and accounted for 55.931% change in service quality.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Percentage Analysis was done to analyze the demographic variables in the study. The below table summarizes the demographic profile of the respondents.

TABLE 3: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

No	Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Gender	Male	63	43.8
		Female	81	56.2
2	Age	20-24	16	11.1
		25-29	41	28.5
		30-34	48	33.3
		35-39	21	14.6
		40-44	9	6.3
		45-49	5	3.5
		50 and above	4	2.8

Respondents were asked whether they have stayed in hotel flats in Al Buraimi before. Sixty four [44.4%] people have stayed before in Al Buraimi and 80[55.6%] people were new in Al Buraimi. 48.3% of the respondents stayed more than two times in hotels on an average a year.

DATA ANALYSIS AND TEST OF HYPOTHESES

Multiple Regression analysis has been used in order to test the hypothetical relationships among the variables used in this research. Each dimension of service quality and its influence on guest satisfaction is tested separately and the overall influence of service quality on guest satisfaction and guest loyalty is also tested. The impact of guest satisfaction on guest loyalty is also empirically tested.

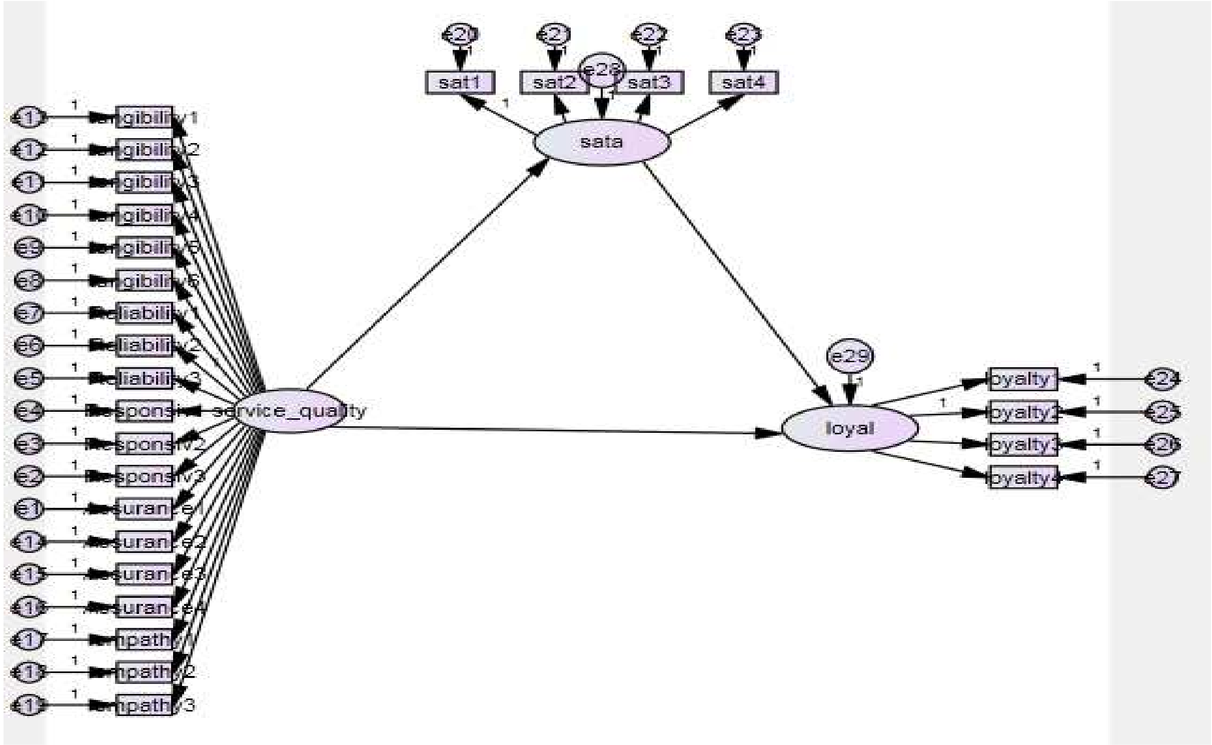
TABLE 4: RESULTS OF HYPOTHESES TESTING

No	*Hypothesis*	*R*	*R2*	*F value*	*Sig Level*	*Durbin Watson*	*Decision*
1	Tangibility dimension positively impact guest satisfaction.	0.520	0.270	43.748	0.000	1.782	Supported
2	Reliability dimension positively impact guest satisfaction.	0.508	0.258	41.035	0.000	2.017	Supported
3	Responsiveness dimension positively impact guest satisfaction.	0.451	0.203	30.088	0.000	1.925	Supported
4	Assurance dimension positively impact guest satisfaction.	0.619	0.383	73.298	0.000	1.888	Supported
5	Empathy dimension positively impact guest satisfaction.	0.531	0.282	46.427	0.000	2.015	Supported
6	Overall service quality positively impact guest satisfaction	0.707	0.500	22.781	0.000	1.965	Supported
7	Guest satisfaction positively impact guest loyalty	0.660	0.435	90.874	0.000	1.687	Supported
8	Overall service quality positively impact guest loyalty	0.718	0.516	125.69	0.000	1.704	Supported

MODEL TESTING

The conceptual model was tested using SEM analysis and the result of the study is provided below:

FIG. 1



RMR, GFI

TABLE 5

Model	RMR	GFI	AGFI	PGFI
Default model	.030	.939	.907	.701
Saturated model	.000	1.000		
Independence model	.129	.333	.282	.309

BASELINE COMPARISONS

TABLE 6

Model	NFI Delta1	RFI rho1	IFI Delta2	TLI rho2	CFI
Default model	.813	.881	.933	.923	.931
Saturated model	1.000		1.000		1.000
Independence model	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

The comparison of RMR, GFI and baseline comparisons shows that the data model is robust and data is fitting to the conceptualized model. Further the estimates of the study is also provided in the table below:

TABLE 7

Satisfaction	<---	Service_quality	.568	.095	6.006	***	
Guest_loyalty	<---	Service_quality	.548	.159	3.446	***	
Guest_loyalty	<---	Satisfaction	.656	.271	2.418	***	

It was found out that among the dimensions of service quality; assurance dimension exerted more impact on guest satisfaction. This is in conformance with the study conducted by(Alrousan & Abuamoud, 2013). Empathy came second to assurance followed by tangibility, reliability and responsiveness. About 50% variation in guest satisfaction could be successfully explained by the independent variable overall service quality. 43.5% change in the variable guest loyalty is attributed to the independent variable guest satisfaction. The positive impact of overall service quality on guest loyalty was confirmed with an R squared value of 0.516 with F value 125.69 and significance level of 0.000. In order to check the influence of demographics on guest satisfaction; independent samples t-test was conducted. Results revealed that gender and age not influence the satisfaction level. The Durbin Watson statistic falls under the acceptable level i.e below 4 which rules out the possibility of autocorrelation.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study indicated that all the dimensions of service quality exert a significant influence on guest satisfaction. Overall service quality highly impacts guest satisfaction and thereby guest loyalty. The assurance dimension exerts more influence on guest satisfaction followed by empathy and tangibility. Overall the guests are satisfied with the level of service quality of the hotel flats in al Buraimi. However continuous effort to raise the quality standards is a must if the hotels need to stay in competition.

The analysis revealed that guests attach more importance to intangible elements of service quality. This is of huge managerial implications. Qualified employees are needed to serve the guests and to cater to their needs. Managers need to focus on this particular aspect to sustain in the increasing competition in the hospitality industry.

LIMITATIONS & SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The sample selected for the study comprised of only Philippine tourists. Other nationalities are not included. In future the research could be conducted on a broader scale by including nationality as a variable. The present study was conducted on hotel flats or serviced apartments in Al Buraimi. In future by including other forms of accommodation a comparative study could be undertaken. Demographic variable used in this research include only gender and age. By incorporating more demographic variables, its mediation effect on guest satisfaction and guest loyalty could be studied.

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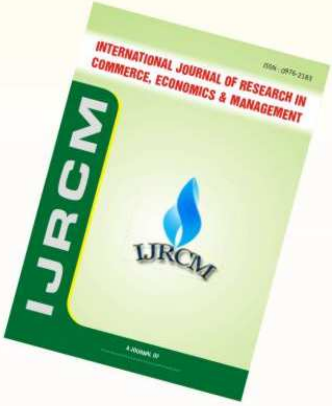
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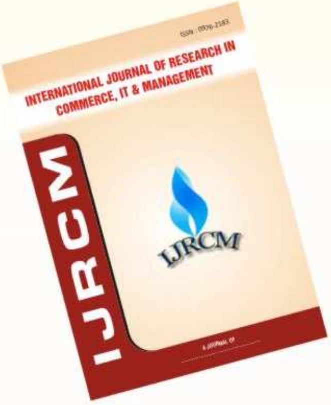
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